

“Living with the Right Focus and Measures”
2 Corinthians 10:12-18
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Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service
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I’m picking up once more with my series on Second Corinthians tonight. I preached from Hebrews back in March and so it’s been seven months since we last looked at 2 Corinthians. We are up to chapter 10, verses 12-18 tonight.

To remind you of what’s going on, at the beginning of chapter 10 there’s a significant shift in tone. Commentator Paul Barnett puts it like this – he says: “It appears that, as the letter draws to its conclusion, Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians becomes more intense emotionally. Like many an orator (and preacher!), he has kept the most urgent and controversial matters until the end and dealt with them passionately so that his last words make their greatest impact on the Corinthians.” [Barnett, 452]

The Apostle Paul begins chapter ten by directly confronting some of the accusations his opponents have made against him. We looked at that back in March.

Then, in verse 12, he shifts from responding to direct accusations, to highlighting an important difference between him and his opponents.

We’ll begin there now – 2 Corinthians 10:12-18. The Apostle Paul writes:

¹² Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commanding themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

¹³ But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence. ¹⁷ “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

This is God’s Word.

I said that in this passage Paul is contrasting himself with his opponents. So we might start by asking: What are his opponents doing wrong? What is Paul warning the Corinthians about when it comes to his opponents?

And we get the main concern he is raising at the beginning and the end of the paragraph: Paul tell us that they are commanding themselves. They are measuring themselves by one another and then using that comparison to commend themselves. And Paul says this is a problem.

So how exactly are they doing that, and what is the problem? What is wrong with the way they are commanding themselves?

Well, one problem that emerges we see in verse 18. Paul writes, “It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” Paul is singling out here those who command themselves but whom the Lord does *not* command – those who measure themselves as being successful, but whom the Lord does *not* measure as being successful. In other words, one of the core flaws in those who command themselves, according to Paul, is that they’re using the wrong measures. They’re using different measures than the Lord is. If they come away with a commendable assessment of themselves, but Christ comes away with an uncommendable assessment, there is something wrong with the assessment tool *they* are using. So one problem underneath their self-commendation is that they are using flawed measures.

But another, if we look closer, is that they are measuring the wrong things.

This needs to be teased out a bit, but we see it in verses 13-16. And it’s tricky because Paul doesn’t address what his opponents are doing directly, but instead he describes himself, and we are meant to take his actions as being in opposition to theirs.

In verses 13-16 Paul talks about the “area of influence” given to him. And it’s helpful to ask what he means there. Paul is talking about the commission he has been given by Christ to minister to the Gentiles – a commission confirmed by the Church. In Acts 9:15 Jesus delivers this commission for Paul to go to the Gentiles. In Galatians 2:9 we read that that commission was confirmed by the leadership of the Church. Paul makes the point that he is merely doing the work Christ has called him to do.

The implication is that his opponents are doing work they had *not* been called to do. Not only that, they are seeking credit for ministry work *they* did not do, but that Paul did.

This might seem like a petty turf battle over ministry, but there is more going on than that.

Not only are Paul’s opponents using the wrong measures, they are measuring the wrong things, because they’re not measuring their progress in the work God gave *them* to do – they are measuring something different. They are measuring their success in an area that God never called them to. And they are doing it because it is an easier way to commend themselves than the real work God may have given them.

As we unpack this passage, the problem of Paul’s opponents begins to emerge.

They’re living their lives commanding themselves. And they’re doing this by measuring the wrong things in their lives, and using the wrong measures to do it. They’re measuring the work God has called *Paul* to rather than the work God has called *them* to. And they’re measuring themselves by comparing themselves to one another, rather than evaluating their work in light of Christ’s standards.

Now it's always easy for us to go after Paul's opponents in these letters. But If we're honest, I think we can see that the Holy Spirit did not include these descriptions in the Scriptures just so we could analyze what *those guys* were like *back then*, or even so that we could analyze what *other* men and women are like *out there* right now. No, the Spirit included these verses in part because we are to see *ourselves* in Paul's opponents as well. At least to some extent, we share their struggle.

We tend to live our lives commanding ourselves. And we do it by focusing on the wrong things, and using the wrong measures.

What does that look like for us?

David Brooks describes how this often works out in our particular culture in his 2004 book *On Paradise Drive*. Now, this is a long quote – but I think it's worth it. Brooks writes this – he says:

“As you look across the landscape of America [...] you see [something in our culture like] a big high school cafeteria with all these different tables. The jocks sit here, the geeks sit there, the drama people sit over there, and the druggies sit somewhere else. All the different cliques know the others exist, and there are some tensions. But they go to different parties, have slightly different cultures, talk about different things, and see different realities. [...] The cliques don't know much about one another, and they all regard the others as vaguely pathetic.

[...]

[Brooks goes on:] “‘Know thyself,’ the Greek philosopher advised. But of course this is nonsense. In the world of self-reinforcing clique communities, the people who are truly happy live by the maxim ‘Overrate thyself.’ They live in a community that reinforces their values every day. The anthropology professor can stride through life knowing she was unanimously elected chairwoman of her crunchy suburb’s sustainable-growth study seminar. She wears the locally approved status symbols: the Tibet-motif dangly earrings, the Andrea Dworkin-inspired hairstyle, the peasant blouse, and the public-broadcasting tote bag. She is, furthermore, the best outdoorswoman in the Georgia O’Keefe Hiking Club, and her paper on twentieth-century Hopi protest graffiti was much admired at last year’s Multidisciplinary OutGroup Research Conference. No wonder she feels so righteous in her beliefs.

“Meanwhile, sitting in the next seat of the coach section on some Southwest Airlines flight, there might be a midlevel executive from a postwar suburb who’s similarly rich in self-esteem. But he lives in a different clique, so he is validated and reinforced according to entirely different criteria and by entirely different institutions.

“Unlike the anthropologist he has never once wanted to free Mumia. He doesn’t even know who Mumia is. But he has been named Payroll Person of the Year by the West Coast Regional Payroll Professional Association. He is interested in college football and tassels. His loafers have tassels. His golf bags have tassels. If he could put tassels around the Oklahoma football vanity license plate on his Cadillac Escalade, his life would be complete.

“These people sit on the plane, hip to hip, and they would be feeling mutually superior if they gave each other a moment’s thought. One of the great observations about this country is that here, everybody can kick everybody else’s [butt]. The crunchies who hike look down on the hunters who squat in the forest downing beers, and the hunters look down on the hikers who perch on logs smoking dope. The fundamentalists look down on the Jewish Buddhist Taoist liberals who think

redwoods are a religious shrine, and the Jewish Buddhist Taoist liberals look down on the fundamentalists who think natural history museums are filled with evolutionist propaganda.

“As you may have noticed, [Brooks continues,] 90 percent of Americans have way too much self-esteem (while the remainder has none at all). Nobody in this decentralized, fluid social structure knows who is mainstream and who is alternative, who is elite and who is populist. Professors at Harvard think the corporate elites run society, while the corporate elites think the cultural elites at Harvard run society. Liberals think their views are courageously unfashionable, and conservatives believe they are bravely dissenting from the mainstream media.

“Most people see themselves living on an island of intelligence in a sea of idiocy. They feel their own lives are going pretty well, even if society as a whole is going down the toilet. They believe their children’s schools are good, even if the nation’s schools in general are terrible. Their own congressperson is okay, even if most of the others should be thrown out of office. Their own values are fine, even if civilization itself is on the verge of collapse. We all live in Lake Wobegon because we are all above average. We are all okay; it’s the vast ocean of morons who are [messing] things up.” [Brooks, 71-74]

Now, what is Brooks getting at?

Brooks is marveling at the variety of measures our society offers us by which we can evaluate ourselves, and the ways we use them to commend ourselves.

Rather than just having a handful of options, we have a wide selection of criteria we can adopt to measure ourselves by one another – a wide range of things to measure, and a wide range of measures to apply to them. And if one criteria doesn’t make us feel that we are superior to others, then we can find another one that does.

The problem in all of this, of course, is *not* that people have different interests or concerns or jobs or social groups. The problem is our tendency to turn each one of those things into a way to measure ourselves by one another, and then commend ourselves.

Rather than having just a few wrong things to focus on and measure, rather than just a couple wrong measures we might apply to ourselves, our society offers a wide range of options.

Pick which one you like. Focus your life on what it tells you to. And pat yourself on the back for how much better you are than all the people around you.

What does that temptation look like for you?

What are the things you tend to measure to determine your worth – to commend yourself compared to others in your life? And what is the measure you tend to use?

Maybe it’s your status in your career. You look at where you are or you look at where you’re sure you’re going, and you shake your head at all those other people failing to advance. You measure your career compared to theirs, and you commend yourself.

Or maybe it is your performance in school. You look at your grades. You look at those not doing as well. You measure yourself by them and you get that great feeling of how successful you are – you commend yourself.

Maybe it's your family life – how your kids are doing compared to your friend's kids.

Maybe it's your home, or your cooking, or other things you are doing for your family.

Maybe it's your popularity – where you rank in the hierarchy of your peers.

Maybe it's ... your church. When you hear how things are done at another church, and you feel that sense of superiority well up ... because *we* do things better here.

Or maybe it's your politics. Maybe it's your values. Maybe it's what you do in your spare time.

What do you measure in order to compare yourself to others and commend yourself?

We all have something. What is it for you?

Whatever it is, Paul here says it's a problem. Paul says it's deeply flawed. And it's flawed not because we shouldn't pursue these things or because we shouldn't evaluate ourselves. It's flawed because we are using these things in ways we never were meant to.

None of these things were meant to be the basis on which we evaluate our lives. And even if they were, such verdicts on our lives were never meant to be reached by simply comparing ourselves to those around us.

Paul shows us the hollowness, the empty meaninglessness of this approach ... but if we step back and look at our lives, we have to admit that we do it. We tend to live our lives commending ourselves, by focusing on the wrong things and using the wrong measures.

If that's the problem, what, according to Paul, is the solution?

Paul shows us in our text tonight that we need to live for Christ's commendation, and that we do this by measuring the work that *he* has called us to do, and using *his measures* as we do so.

We need to live for Christ's commendation, by measuring the work that he has called us to do, using his measures.

Now what exactly does that look like?

Well, Paul shows us by example in our text.

First, in response to his opponents, who are commending themselves by measuring the wrong things, Paul tells the Corinthians that he is measuring the work the Lord has *called* him to do.

That is a lot of what is going on in verses 13-16. Let's hear it again. Paul writes, “¹³ But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.”

Now if we're not careful we can misread Paul as disparaging any kind of work or even ministry that is not pioneer missionary work and evangelism. It can sound like Paul is saying that that kind of work is all that really matters. He says in verse 14 that his confidence (that's what he means by “boast” [Barnett, 94, 486]) – his confidence is in the fact that *he* was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth. He says in verse 15 and 16 that his hope, his focus, is to extend that evangelistic work further. Why is *that* what Paul focuses on? Is he telling us that evangelism is all that really matters?

Well ... no.

Paul here is looking at what Christ has specifically called *him* to do.

As we said earlier, in Acts 9:15 we hear Christ call Paul specifically to the work of pioneer evangelism to the Gentiles. In Galatians 2:9 we hear how the church confirmed that calling. Paul knows what his calling is from Christ and that is what he is focused on. Christ will have a somewhat different calling for *each* of his people. Paul knows that. He also knows what Christ has called *him* to. And so in verses 13-16 he is expressing his awareness that the thing that will be measured in *his* life is how faithful *he* was to the calling Christ placed on *him*. So what Paul is really doing in these verses is focusing on what Christ has called *him specifically* to do.

But beyond that, Paul also recognizes the right measure. He realizes, he says in verse 18, that his own measure of himself is irrelevant. He realizes, he points out in verse 12, that being measured in relation to others is meaningless. He realizes, he explains in verse 18, that all that really matters is the measurement that Christ will carry out. It is *Christ* who will commend him or not, and that commendation (or lack of it) will outweigh every other evaluation he faces in life.

In some sense, Paul's approach is an attempt to live in light of the future – the future in which Christ will measure and commend each of his servants.

But it's not an easy thing to live our day-to-day lives in light of that distant future reality.

I think I've mentioned it here before, but one of Rachel's and my favorite shows is *Doctor Who*. It's a science fiction show put out by the BBC. It's about a human-looking alien with a time machine, who travels through space and time, usually with a human companion or two. The alien is known simply as “The Doctor”. His friend who travels with him in season five is named Amy.

And sometimes they travel into space and the future and deal with aliens and things like that. But other times they travel back in time, in earth's history ... and to be honest, they usually end up fighting aliens there too for some reason.

Anyway, there is one episode in which they go back in time to visit Vincent Van Gogh.

Van Gogh, as you may know, suffered from mental illness in his life. He was often frustrated and in pain, and his art career did not amount to much while he was alive. In 1890, he killed himself, and it was only after his death that he became famous.

Well, in this particular episode of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor and Amy travel back to visit Van Gogh in June of 1890 – not long before he killed himself.

They visit him, they befriend him, they of course fight an alien with his help (because that's what they tend to end up doing on *Doctor Who*).

But what is most striking in the episode is at the very end. They're saying goodbye to Van Gogh, who is alone, and feels relatively hopeless that his art will ever amount to anything, and the Doctor gets an idea. He gathers Amy and Van Gogh, gets them in the time machine, and they shoot forward in time to Paris in 2010.

Once there, he takes Van Gogh to the Musée d'Orsay art museum. And as they walk through different exhibits, Van Gogh marvels at each.

And then they walk into another room. And this one is filled with paintings by Van Gogh. And this man, who in his lifetime, according to the measurements around him, seemed to amount to nothing in his art – this same man now sees his work hanging prominently in a world class museum, with people from all over the world marveling at what he has done.

The Doctor, intentionally standing in earshot of Van Gogh, asks the museum tour guide, “Where do you think Van Gogh rates in the history of art?”

The tour guide of course doesn't realize Van Gogh is standing beside him and answers the Doctor, saying, “Well, big question, but to me, Van Gogh is the finest painter of them all. Certainly, the most popular great painter of all time. The most beloved. His command of color, the most magnificent. He transformed the pain of his tormented life into ecstatic beauty. Pain is easy to portray, but to use your passion and pain to portray the ecstasy and joy and magnificence of our world – no one had ever done it before. Perhaps no one ever will again. To my mind, that strange, wild man who roamed the fields of Provence was not only the world's greatest artist, but also one of the greatest men who ever lived.”

Van Gogh, hearing this, bursts into tears. He thanks the man (who of course is confused and has no idea whom he is talking to), and then the Doctor and Amy bring Van Gogh back to his own time. As he steps out of the time machine, he says, “This changes everything. I'll step out tomorrow with my easel on my back a different man.”

Now it doesn't shock us to hear this fictional Van Gogh say that – but I want us to think a bit about *why* that is the case. *Why* would this change everything for him?

Well, it would change everything because that vision of future commendation, of future evaluation – that knowledge should recast how Van Gogh sees his present. In his day-to-day life Van Gogh was tempted to let the world around him skew his view of his work. The world around him saw his work as mediocre, or worse. Van Gogh often found himself trading his original artwork just in exchange for more art supplies. Measured by those around him, his work had little value.

But from the perspective of 2010, from the perspective of the future, he could see what value his work had. He could hear the future verdict now. And that should inspire him! That should change things! That should enable him to live focused on the right things, using the right measures.

And so with us. We live far too often in light of the verdicts and evaluations we hear from the world today. We live in light of how we evaluate ourselves with those around us. But Paul reminds us that we are called to live today in light of the future verdict we will receive – the future commendation we hope to hear from Christ. And living in light of *that* should change everything, just as living in light of the knowledge of his future success should have changed everything for the fictional Van Gogh in the *Doctor Who* episode.

It would be easy to end the illustration there, to remind you not to live your life today by focusing on the commendations of this world and measuring yourselves by those around you, but to live your life in perspective of that final commendation, that final evaluation you will receive at the end of time – like the fictional Van Gogh says he will after seeing and hearing the judgment of history on his painting.

But the episode on Van Gogh goes on, actually. The Doctor and Amy drop Van Gogh off in 1890 and then get back into their time machine and go right back to the museum in 2010.

Amy is excited. She is sure that what Van Gogh has seen will change his life. He won't kill himself now; he will be inspired, and it will change everything. "Oh, the long life of Vincent Van Gogh!" she exclaims as she runs down the museum hall towards the Van Gogh exhibit. "There'll be hundreds of new paintings," she says.

But the Doctor tries to caution her that that *may not* be the case.

They get to the Van Gogh wing ... and nothing is really that different. They overhear the tour guide talking about Van Gogh's suicide in 1890 ... just as before.

Why didn't this new knowledge change everything as it should have for this fictional Van Gogh?

Well, for one thing, Van Gogh suffered from mental illness, so that sort of throws a wrench in the whole illustration; but setting that aside, what other reason is there for why this new knowledge did not change everything for this fictional Van Gogh?

Well ... I think a lot of it is for the same reason that the knowledge *we* have about *our* future judgment before Christ doesn't change *our* lives. It's one thing to believe it for a moment. It is another thing to hold on to it, another thing to live, day-to-day, as if it's true.

There's something insightful, something realistic and profound even, in this sort of silly *Doctor Who* episode.

It's easy for us to *say* that we need to live our lives in light of the future commendation we hope to receive from Christ. It's another thing to do it – to keep the vision of his future commendation in front of us and to truly live in light of it.

Doing *that* is hard. And that is why so few do it.

It's why Paul's opponents looked for temporal commendation instead. It's why *we* so often look for temporal commendation instead. It's why we look to whatever subculture or lifestyle group we may choose to give us an alternate set of criteria for measuring our lives. Because we can feel *that* commendation *now*, whereas it's *hard* to live in light of that future commendation from Christ.

Living our day-to-day lives in light of the future, eternal commendation of Christ is difficult ... but it's not impossible.

The Apostle Paul does it. So how do we follow him? How do we, as he encourages us in 1 Corinthians 11:1 – how do we imitate Paul as he imitates Christ?

For most of us I think it requires a regular, maybe even daily act of setting eternal realities before us. It requires the development of a habit really of reminding ourselves of these truths.

We can think of that habit as maybe asking ourselves three questions on a regular or even daily basis. Three questions we need to ask not because we don't know the answers to them, but because we need to *remember* the answers to them, lest we drift away from them.

So, here are what those questions might look like:

First, what is Christ calling *you* to *today*?

It's a simple question, but an important one. We can easily spend all our mental energy on what we hope to be doing *tomorrow*, or what *others* are doing today, but that's not the question that really matters for us today. The question for us is: What is Christ calling *you* to *today*?

That's why Paul keeps focusing on the specifics of his calling in our text. He's not going to let his main focus drift to work others might be called to. He knows his mission.

What does that look like for you? What are the ordinary (though often difficult) tasks Christ has given you to do right now? How is he calling you to love and serve those around you? How is he calling you to live your life in loving obedience to him? What are the specifics of that calling?

The world offers us many alternative callings. It urges us to live vicariously through others and their callings. It urges us to envy others' callings. It pushes us to live mentally in the future instead of the present.

To follow in Paul's footprints we need to resist those offers. We need to remind ourselves daily what our core calling is.

So first, what is Christ calling *you* to *today*?

Second, we need to ask: What does Christ value in the work he's given you to do?

What are *his* priorities in that work? Because even when we rightly identify our calling, we face the temptation of evaluating it by the wrong measures.

This is what Paul's opponents were doing. They were measuring themselves by one another and comparing themselves with one another. But not Paul. Paul reminds us, even when we've identified the call Christ has given us, "it is not the one who commands himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commands."

And this is hard, because the world provides many opportunities for us to measure ourselves by others.

Christ may be calling you to care for your family today – to meet their needs. If that's right, then it's good to start there.

But the internet quickly provides you with a whole range of ways to measure yourself by others: whether it's looking at the carefully crafted Instagram post of a friend's professional-grade craft time with their kids, which makes you feel terrible, *or* a shared news story about an incident or a trend of bad parenting going on somewhere else, which you can look at and then feel really good about yourself – since that isn't you.

But ... how you stack up to your Martha-Stewart-like friend or the parents featured in an outrage gossip piece is not *really* what Christ is concerned about.

Christ values specific things in how you raise your children. He values how you love them. He values how you instruct them. He values how you direct and discipline them. He values how you communicate him to them.

Of course you're not going to do those things perfectly – no one does (no matter what Instagram says). That's not even what we're asking. We're asking: Is that even what you're aiming for? Are you aiming for Christ's values, or some other set of values?

As Paul reminds us: "It is not the one who commands himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commands."

The same thing can be true of our jobs. We know the work we are called to do there – the tasks God has given us in his providence. But how quickly do we fall into measuring ourselves by others: whether we are comparing ourselves with a friend or co-worker whose career seems to be cruising along so much more successfully than ours is, leading us to feel down; or whether we compare

ourselves to a friend or co-worker whose career is a mess, making us feel successful and like we have it together by comparison?

Again, this isn't what Christ is interested in. Christ is concerned with whether we are serving *faithfully* in the tasks we've been given to do. He's concerned with whether we are serving *ethically*. He's concerned with whether we are blessing those around us by the work we do *and* the way we do it. He's concerned with whether we are faithful witnesses *to him* in how we conduct ourselves. He's concerned with how we conduct ourselves even when no one else is looking.

Other measures offer themselves, but in the end they are meaningless. "It is *not* the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends."

And we could go on to think through what the Lord values in a variety of callings: our calling to be neighbors, our calling to be friends, our calling to be sons or daughters, our calling to be church members, our calling to be involved with our civic society ... maybe even our calling to face a difficult trial, a season of suffering, while others look on.

We need to acknowledge the false measures the world offers us in each of those areas. And then we need to remind ourselves what Christ values – what *he* is concerned about.

Because again: "It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends."

So we ask what Christ is calling *us* to *today*.

We ask what *Christ* values in the work he's given us to do.

Third, we ask what it would be like to receive Christ's commendation.

And here we use our sanctified imagination a little bit. Here we meditate, even just for a minute – even just for a few seconds! – on what it would be like to receive Christ's commendation, what it would be like to stand before the king of the universe and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What would it be like to receive praise from the one who made heaven and earth – the one who knows you better than you know yourself? How would that make you feel?

It's important to think about that for a couple reasons.

One, because we've been talking about pushing back against the ways the world encourages us to commend ourselves. And that's hard to do. And it's essential to see that we are not pushing that kind of commendation aside and replacing it with nothing – with nothing but a hollow silence – but we're pushing it aside to replacing it with something far grander, far more meaningful, and far more joyous. We're seeking instead the commendation of our King and Maker. And his commendation will send a thrill through our hearts that will more than make up for every self-commendation we could have accrued from the world's standards in this life.

But a second reason it's important for us to think about this is that we need to keep in mind what kind of judgment we face in Christ. For those of us who have trusted in Christ, who have received

his grace, who have trusted in his death and resurrection on our behalf for our salvation, we do not face a cold and exacting judge. We stand before Christ, our elder brother, who, Paul reminds us elsewhere, loved us and give himself for us. We are standing also before our loving heavenly Father, who has adopted us into his family. We stand before him with our sins forgiven, and Christ evaluates us *not* like a picky bureaucrat holding a clipboard, looking for violations ... but like a loving parent. A parent calling their child to do *real* things, *difficult* things even, but a parent anxious to encourage, anxious to see the good, anxious to commend. He doesn't give gold stars out for nothing – it's not like that. But he is *for* us, not against us. He helps us, and encourages us, and longs to commend us.

Paul lived his life with his sights set on that reality. He ruthlessly reminded himself what he was called to, and pushed aside competing callings, no matter how attractive they might have been to him.

He kept himself focused again and again not on how he compared to those around him, but on how faithful he was being to what the Lord wanted to see in his life.

And he strove forward by reminding himself of the crown that awaited him, the only crown that truly matters, the commendation of Christ.

And those dynamics are not just true for the extraordinary life that the Apostle Paul lived. They're true for the ordinary lives you and I are called to as well.

Because despite the false measures offered by the world ... despite false commendations or false accusations coming from our hearts ... in the end, Paul is right: "It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends."

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Barnett, Paul. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.
Brooks, David. *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (And Always Have) in the Future Tense*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
Doctor Who, Season 5, Episode 10: "Vincent and the Doctor." Originally aired June 5, 2010.
Wright, N.T. *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004.