

Hey, it's a great honor to have all of you with us today at every single Life.Church across the country, all of our Open Network churches. We are so thankful for you. And all over the world, on the other side of computer screens, at Church Online, you're a part of our family and we absolutely believe that you're not here by accident. Welcome today. We're actually in part four of a message series called Selfless. If you weren't here in previous weeks, we actually talked week number one, about being bold in spirit. Week number two, we talked about being faithful in service. Last week, we talked about being extravagant in generosity. And today, I want to talk about a phrase that may sound a bit odd to you at first, but I think it might actually sink in. We're gonna talk about being grateful in the grind. Grateful in the grind. Let me introduce this idea to you, and I'm guessing that a lot of you may be able to relate on one level or another. For so much of my life, I've lived under the illusion that there's something around the corner, something out there that's coming that really really matters and it matters more than what I'm doing right now. There's something around the corner that's going to make the difference. It's that thing that I desire, it's the event that I'm looking for, it's that whatever that something that's gonna bring meaning and fulfillment and give me that significant moment that I've been looking for. It's not here. It's somewhere out there. I'll give you an example of kinda how the story has played out in my life, and I can almost guess for sure that many of you have a similar version of your own story. Let's talk about the category of ministry for me. When I was 22 years of age, I went to work for First United Methodist Church. I was so so so so so excited but I was in full time ministry and I was in seminary full time and commuting and dying, because it was so hard. And in my mind, I consistently said, when I get out of seminary, then real life is going to start. Then when I got out of seminary, I had another when-then, and my new one was well, when I get to start my own church and do things my own way, then life is gonna be really amazing. Then we started Life.Church and my next one was when I get a staff member, somebody else that can help, someone else that cares, then it'll be amazing. Then it was, when we get out of this dumpy little building and get into a real building that we could meet in seven days a week, then it's gonna be amazing. Take the category of family. When I finally meet the girl that I'm gonna marry, then life is gonna start. Then I meet Amy. When we finally get married. Oh dear God, thank You, Jesus, hallelujah, thank You, Lord, then. Life is going to start. When we have our first baby, that's when our family is gonna be amazing. When our first baby gets out of diapers. Then it's gonna be incredible. Now they're growing up, you know. When they're in college and we have. When they're out of college, we'll eat again. You know, all these different things. When, then, and I found myself whatever season I was in, wishing the current season away, waiting for the next one to come. One day, just around the corner. They'll be that something, that achievement, that accomplishment, that friendship, that possession, that vacation. They'll be that something that fills the emptiness on the inside. But, around every corner, there was just another challenge. Another goal, another vision, another dream, or another perceived prize. I've lived long enough now to kind of look back and to see a real weakness in my own life. And what I've noticed is for so much of my life, I've been pursuing what I want. My dreams, my passions, my goals, and whatever it is that I get, there's gotta be something else out there that's better than what I have right now. And what does culture do? Culture totally and completely feeds into this mindset, right? What does every commercial, every advertisement, everything you see on social media, it all just kinda says gratify yourself, indulge yourself, get whatever you want. You deserve it. Treat yo self, right? The problem is, Jesus said, if you want to follow Me, you don't treat yo self, but He said, you deny yo self. That's what He said. He said, if you want to be My disciple, you don't indulge yourself. You deny yourself. Then He said, you take up your cross, a metaphor, a picture to say, you're

actually dying to your own fleshly desires so you can live by My Spirit and then He said, then you follow Me. You don't treat yo self. Jesus said, you deny yourself. There's a verse that I want to use kind of as an anchor verse for our message today. It's from the Apostle Paul and we're gonna talk a lot about the Apostle Paul today. He says this in 1 Corinthians 10:31, he says, Whatever you do. Let's all say that aloud. He said whatever you do. Say it aloud, all of our churches.

- [All] Whatever you do.

- What did he say? He said, do it all for the glory of God. Whatever you do. Whether you're doing laundry, you're picking up your kids from their events, you're running errands for your boss, you're doing something that isn't that big of a deal. Whatever you do, you do it for the glory of God. When I look at so much of my life, if I'm really honest, whatever I do is mostly for me. I want to do what makes me happy. I want to do what makes me feel good. I want to do what fulfills my dreams. I want to do what fulfills wants and desires. I want to do what I want to do. I want to gratify myself. And Jesus says that you deny yourself. Whatever you do, to really have meaning in life, you do it for the glory of God. And here's what I'm beginning to recognize, this truth. That the prize isn't out there, somewhere. The prize isn't what you accomplish occasionally. The prize is in what you do daily when you do it for the glory of God. Let me say this again, because I really want it to sink in. The prize isn't what you accomplish occasionally. I got the raise, I got the thing. The prize isn't what you accomplish occasionally. The prize is in what you do daily when you do it for the glory of God. So I want to ask three questions and I'll tell you in advance that these questions are gonna become statements that are gonna drive everything that we talk about in our message today. What if, what if, what if, what if what if the work is the reward? What if the prize is in the process? What if you can be grateful in the grind? What if, whatever you do you can find meaning and fulfillment and divine satisfaction when you do it all for the glory of God? I want to show you a text that, it's very personal to me by again the Apostle Paul. 1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 9. This is what Paul says. He's kinda being transparent and maybe a little bit vulnerable. He says, I'm the least of the apostles and I don't even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. In other words, before I was a Jesus follower, I was really really bad. I hated Christians, so much I even killed them. He says, but, everybody say but.

- [Congregation] But.

- He said but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. But, this is my story, by the grace of God, I am what I am, because His grace to me was not without effect. For many of you, that's your story. You weren't good, you weren't faithful, you weren't always righteous, but by the grace of God, you are now what you are not because you're good, but because He was good. Now you are becoming who He wants you to be, because His grace for you was not without effect. The sad thing is there are some of you that are here today that His grace has been without effect, because it hasn't yet touched your heart. You haven't yet been changed by it, and the good news is, you are in the right place at the right time to be available to the work of God, and maybe your story might become a but, by the grace of God, I am now who I am. Paul goes on to say this, and I love what he says. He says, no, I worked harder than all of them. I am only what I am by the grace of God and I worked harder than any of the rest of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. What did he just say? I wasn't any good, but the grace of God transformed me. And because of

who Jesus is, and because of what He did, I worked hard. I worked harder than the rest of them. But it wasn't me doing the work, it was the grace of God through me doing what God called me to do. I worked harder than all of them. That verse ministers to me on so many different levels. What I like about it is I don't think Paul was bragging. I don't think he was complaining. I think he was just stating the truth, matter of fact. By the grace of God, I just worked hard. I've been so transformed by Jesus, because of who He was and what He did, I just got to work. Whatever I did, I was doing it for His glory. I worked harder than all of them. I can't even begin to imagine the depths of the sacrifices that the Apostle Paul would have made. In fact, I would give anything if I could like go back in time and be there with him and like sit down, just bro to bro, 'kay, by a fire pit, you know. He's drinking wine, I'm drinking water, 'cause I don't drink wine. But you know, he's had a couple glasses and we're just chatting. Like, unpack that for me, man. Tell me what you mean by that. You know, just guy to guy, you know, follower of Jesus to follower of Jesus, what do you mean you worked harder? And I can imagine him saying, like, well, okay, you know, I'm not bragging, but, you know, while other people went to bed, I probably stayed up a little later praying and strategizing. I got up a little earlier and got into the office, you know, really to do things right for God. When most desired comfort, I realized that following Jesus was not gonna be comfortable. You know, I was beaten, had to go on. Shipwrecked, well, you just move on. One time I was bitten by a poisonous snake. I didn't like that, but I shook that thing off, you know, and he just kinda tells the story. While others took a short cut, I always tried to do the right thing. I can just see it. I memorized so much of God's Word, I hid it in my heart, I let it renew my mind. I focused on His Word. If he wasn't being really humble, he could say, and I wrote a lot of the New Testament, but I'm just saying'. I did that as well. I can imagine him saying, you know what, when I was in prison, I kept on working. I served Jesus even when I was in prison. When we went to cities that didn't have a single Christian, we managed to start churches in cities without a single Christian. We'd lead someone to Christ, and someone else. We'd raise up leaders and we didn't have a lot of resources, we just got the job done. I worked harder than everyone else. I think if you can look at this kind of objectively and step back, what you would find is you would probably say Paul was not wishing his current season away. Wherever he was, he was all there. Whatever he did, he was doing for the glory of God. When he was in prison, he didn't say, one day, when I'm finally out of prison, then I can get back to doing what I'm called to do. No, he just said, whatever you do, I'm gonna do it for the glory of God. If there's someone chained up to me, I'm gonna be a witness to that person right now. Give me a pen, give me some paper. I'm writing the Philippians a letter, 'cause they need it. I'm just gonna do whatever I have to do. When he shipwrecked, do you know what he didn't say? Well, God let me down. I mean, I prayed for protection, and here I am, shipwrecked again. He's like, you know what, we didn't die so we might as well keep on going. God must still be with us. Whenever Barnabas turned on him, he didn't go, oh, I can't take it anymore. Christians, you can't trust any of them. I'm leaving the Sunday School class because Barnabas hurt my feelings. No, he said, you know what, I don't have time for this. I'm not gonna get bitter. We just, we still have work to do. Because whatever I'm doing I'm doing it for the glory of God. I don't know how this would apply to you but you're changing diapers, you're making sales calls, you're doing laundry, you're doing something for your boss. You just say, in this moment, at this time, even though it may not be incredibly sexy from the outside, I'm doing it with integrity, with the purity of heart, with the heart of a servant, and I'm declaring that this task is now for the glory of God. And when you live this way, suddenly you wake up when you start to realize wow, maybe the work is the reward. Maybe the prize is in the process. And in everyday life, when you're grinding it out, doing just normal things, you can say, I can be

grateful. I can be grateful in the middle of the grind. What I want to do is show you what I call three enemies of the true reward. Unfortunately some of you will know these enemies as I do. Three enemies of the true reward. The first one is what I call the pillow. The seduction of comfort. The pillow, the seduction of comfort. And I don't know how this plays out in your life but at some point it might be what you really need to be happy and comfortable is a better home. And then just fill in the blanks with the type. If you don't have walk-in closets, it's walk-in closets. If it's not granite countertops, it's granite countertops. Maybe it's a gas stove, maybe it's a three-car garage, maybe it's heated tiles in your bathroom. Whatever it is, if I just had that, then I'd be happy. Same thing with the car. Years ago, you know what I needed? I needed windows that went down when you did this, because mine went down when you did this. Then it's the sunroof, then it's the butt warmers, then it's the, you know, whatever it is, if I can just have that one, then I'll finally be happy. Well, if I was just the boss, if I had enough money, to take life easy, that's what I want. Enough to take life easy. I hope you'll understand that God never called us to easy.

- [Woman] Amen.

- He called us to deny ourselves. Easy never changed the world. And yet the pillow cries out, the seduction of comfort. There's also the distraction of what I call the shiny thing. The shiny thing. The allure of constant distractions. You know what's important but bing, notification. Oh my gosh, I wonder what she posted on Facebook. And the next thing you know, you're in here. Netflix, it just keeps on running and the next show is recommended 99% chance that I'm going to like it. This must be God's will. We over-program our kids, because we're so distracted. We gotta have Johnny in the elite traveling soccer league if he's gonna get a scholarship for the NCAA, because, I know he's only three, but he's gotta, you know, we really got to get him involved in this. And it's the shiny thing. It's the carrot and the donkey continues to chase the carrot and you never ever ever seem to find real satisfaction because you've been fooled by the shiny thing. Then, there is the enemy called the towel. The perpetual temptation to quit, to throw in the towel. When the marriage gets difficult, I'm not in love anymore, this isn't worth it. Throw in the towel. Trying to get our finances together, trying to get out of debt. Oh my gosh, it just broke. Here's another bill. Charge it, let's go out to eat and let's go shop for a new dress. You know, throw in the towel. Christianity, I can't tell you how many times I've heard some version of this. Well, I tried God. I went to church twice. You know, I read my Bible for a day. You know, and they were mean. I didn't like it, I couldn't get a parking place, so forget it, I'm just out of here. I'm throwing in the towel. You know how it is. They didn't appreciate me. I'm not making that much of a difference. This is just too hard. Throw in the towel. Listen, you can throw in the towel or you can pick up the towel and wipe the sweat off your brow and get back in the daily grind. Of doing whatever you do in this moment for the glory of God. And suddenly you realize, the work is the reward. The prize is in the process. And I can be grateful every single day in the grind. Tell you a little pet peeve I have. Graduation speeches. I've given a couple and mine are different. The normal graduation speech is this. Follow your passion, follow your passion, follow your heart, do whatever your heart tells you. Here's the problem, you young graduates. Your passion doesn't always pay the bills. Your passion doesn't always keep the lights on. The problem with passion is selfish passion is about us. There's a higher calling and it's not selfish passion but it's selfless purpose. It's a higher calling. And once you start to recognize that you're doing God's purpose, what's so amazing is the passion always follows purpose. So instead of me being the starting point of I need to do what I want to do to be happy, instead, when God is the

starting point, whatever you do, you do it for the glory of God and you start to realize in the middle of even what you may not have chosen, God still has a purpose and then you recognize that you're doing what God has called you to, even in this moment, though it may not be your favorite thing. When you're serving His purpose, your passions starts to always follow purpose. Think about Paul for a minute. The guy was passionate about something. He was a regular person. I don't know what it would have been. Maybe it was music. Maybe he had a guitar and he's like, he's really good, he's like putting his clips up on YouTube. Like, first Justin Bieber, then you have Apostle Paul. They're gonna discover me, I know they are. You know, maybe it was music. Maybe it was art. Like, you know, let me get my paintings done, I'm gonna sell them really big. And you know, they're gonna want them all the time. You know, if he was living today, it's like, it's cars. I know what is. The Tesla, that's what I need to be happy. You know, whatever it is, Paul had his own passions. There were things that he was excited about. What he was not passionate about, let me promise you, was getting beaten and left for dead. I promise you, that was never on his, oh, if I could only do that, I'd be so happy in life. But instead of pursuing selfish, self-centered passion, what he did was he pursued God's purpose. And suddenly he would say things like Acts 20:24. I consider my life worth nothing to me. None of my dreams, my wants. My only aim is to finish the race, complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me. We can say this, my only dream is to fill God's purpose. And what is that? The task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. What does purpose do? Purpose helps us feel passionate about ordinary things. Something mundane, something ordinary starts to take on meaning. Whatever I do, even if it's boring, even if it feels insignificant, I'm doing it for the glory of God. Some of you, you experience that this week when you're serving. You found joy when you're simply making someone else coffee. When you're in the two-year room, holding a baby and you're praying over that two year old. When you read an eighth grade group of Switch girls and you realize in this moment, God is using me to pour spiritual life into the emerging generation. When you simply open up your home and provide a LifeGroup a place for people to find spiritual connection. What normally seems ordinary becomes more extraordinary because it's not just a task, but it's a purpose directed by God and passion always follows purpose. Paul, he gives us really profound images. He says this. He says, I'm not running like someone who's running aimlessly. I love that image. I'm running in a direction. He says I'm not boxing like someone who's shadow boxing. I'm in a real spiritual fight. He says, I run with purpose. This is what he said. I run with purpose in every single step. Imagine that. When I wake up, God, today this is Your day. This is the day the Lord has made. And whatever I do, whether it seems big, exciting or small and insignificant. God, I am choosing to find purpose in this. I am doing this for Your glory. I'm not running like a man running aimlessly. I am running with purpose in every step. I'm directed by Your Spirit. I'm empowered by Your Word. I'm loving people everywhere I go. When I walk into the room, the Spirit of God walks in the room with me. I'm a climate changer. I'm a people lover. I lift the moods of people. When I come into a dark room, light comes in with me. There's nowhere I go that I don't go on purpose. I go with the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, dwelling within me. I walk in with purpose. I am here as an ambassador of the Most High God, the highest ranking diplomat sent from heaven to earth to represent the goodness and the love and the grace of God. This step is on purpose and this step is on purpose. And my word of encouragement to you is on purpose. And this gift is on purpose. When I lift you up and when I love you, it's on purpose because I don't do anything halfheartedly. Whatever I do, I'm doing it for the One who changed my life. You see, if you knew me before, you would think, you're not good enough. But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And because of what He's done in me, you need to know, I work hard. But it's not me doing

the work, it's the grace of God in me that's getting it done. Whatever you do, and I don't know who this is gonna speak to, but when you're driving your kids all over town, you're doing it for the glory of God. When you're preparing for grad school, or you're fighting to hold your marriage together, you're doing it on purpose with purpose in every step for the glory of God. When you're crying with your spouse because you want to conceive, and you cannot conceive, when you're carrying for your aging parents, when you feel like you're called to do something more and you're stuck in a job that you don't love, when you're healing from a crushing disappointment, or when you're battling cancer or when you're paying down debt, you're doing what you do for the glory of God, recognizing His purpose in the moment. And somehow passion seems to always follow purpose. The prize is not when you get the promotion. The prize isn't when you get the fancy car. The prize isn't when you go to the beach or to the mountains or to the place with the big mouse. The prize isn't when your five year dreams all come true or when you get discovered or when you finally make the big bucks. The prize is now. The prize is here. This is the day that the Lord has made. And because of the grace of God, I will rejoice and I will be glad in it. You see, life isn't about me. It's not about indulging myself. Not about treating myself. It's about denying myself. And when I deny myself, guess what happens? Week number one, I become more bold in spirit because we speak boldly about what we believe deeply. And because the grace of Jesus has so transformed me, I cannot contain His goodness and people are amazed by my boldness. I also become faithful in service because serving is not something that I do. A servant is who I am. I am a servant of the Most High God. And when I serve others, I am serving Christ. I'm not trying to be the goat of this world. I'm trying to be great by serving, so that one day when I stand before Jesus, He will say, well done, My good and faithful servant. When I'm selfless, I become extravagant in generosity. I give without holding back because we truly believe, as followers of Jesus, that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. Therefore we lead the way with irrational generosity. And when I recognize that I have been transformed, by the grace of God and for His glory, then whatever I do is not for me. But it's all for the glory of God as I run with purpose in every single step. And as I serve Him faithfully in His purpose, the passion follows, because I'm not doing it for me, and I'm all doing it all for Him. And then one day, I wake up in the middle of the mundane, and the middle of the normal and I say, God, I have experienced You here and I am full of Your goodness and overflowing with Your joy because I've discovered that the work is the reward. It's a joy to serve You and to sacrifice for Your kingdom. The prize is in the process. You are with me, Your Spirit is guiding me and strengthening me. And I am grateful in the grind. Finding joy in all things, rejoicing always, God, because Your Spirit dwells within me and You're working in all things to bring about good. So therefore, God, because I am selfless, denying myself, I can be grateful in the grind. And whatever I do, I will do it for Your glory because of who You are and what You've done for me. All of our churches, let's take a moment and pray together. Father, we thank You so much that I know Your Spirit is speaking to people today in a way that will be powerful, God, and I hope life-changing. At all of our different churches as you reflect today in prayer, I wonder how many of you would say, okay, I am totally there with you, Craig. I've wished away so much of my life, hoping for the next season and failed to embrace the goodness of God in the moment. I want to do everything I do, God, help me to do it for Your glory. If you could relate to that and you want it, would you lift your hands right now? All of our different churches. Oh God, thank You so much that You're speaking to so many people right now. Father, I pray that You would give us a sense of purpose, knowing that even though we may be doing something that seems like preparation for a future season, this moment matters when we do it for You. God, give us a sense of purpose. Help us to see

joy and find fulfillment in serving, even doing the little things, God, when we connect it to You. Whatever we do, wherever we are, God, whoever we're helping. Even when we're struggling, God, help us to serve You faithful, being faithful in the small things. You could trust us with even more. God, help us to recognize that the work can be the reward. That the prize is in the process. That we can be grateful in the middle of the grind, God, because You are with us, but by the grace of God we are what we are, and because Your grace was not without effect, God, help us to serve You faithful in all that we do. But not us, God, but Your grace working through us. God, help us, that whatever we do, we would do it, God, for Your glory. As you keep praying today at all of our different churches, some of you, you're gonna recognize, just like I did years ago, that life is all about you. Man, when I look at my life, as I look back, I recognize it was all about my dreams, what I wanted. If there was anything to do with God, it was only what God could do for me. I came to recognize that Jesus, who He was, what He means. He is the sinless Son of God. He was selfless in every single way that while we were still sinning, Christ was obedient, even to death on the cross. He died in our place, the sinless One for us, who are guilty. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead. Why, so that He would defeat death, hell, and the power of the grave so that anyone, and this includes you, who calls on the name of Jesus, the name that is above every name, when you call on the name of Jesus, you would be saved. Every sin you've ever committed, forgiven by God, transformed in a moment by the grace and the goodness of God. Up to now, His grace may have been without effect, but in this moment, you're gonna say, I've been transformed. Forgiven, made completely new. Not because you're good, but because He's good. But by the grace of God, you're about to be transformed, all of our churches, those who say yes, I need His grace, I need His forgiveness. Life is not about me. I turn from my sins, I turn toward Him. I give my life to Him. That's your prayer, lift your hands high right now, all over the place and say yes. As we've got hands going up at all of our different churches, those of you at Church Online. Would you simply click right below me, and we're all going to pray together. Would you simply pray aloud with those around you? Pray, Heavenly Father.

- [Congregation] Heavenly Father.
- Today I trust You.
- [Congregation] Today I trust You.
- To save me.
- [Congregation] To save me.
- And forgive me.
- [Congregation] And forgive me.
- Of all my sins.
- [Congregation] Of all my sins.
- Fill me with Your Spirit.
- [Congregation] Fill me with Your Spirit.

- So I could know You.
- [Congregation] So I could know You.
- And serve You.
- [Congregation] And serve You.
- And follow You.
- [Congregation] And follow You.
- For the rest of my life.
- [Congregation] For the rest of my life.
- My life is not mine.
- [Congregation] My life is not mine.
- I give it to You.
- [Congregation] I give it to You.
- Thank You for new life.
- [Congregation] Thank You for new life.
- Now You have mine.
- [Congregation] Now You have mine.
- In Jesus' name I pray.
- [Congregation] In Jesus' name I pray.
- Life.Church, would you celebrate big today? Welcome people born into God's family.