

Are You Serious? – 2 Cor 13:5

Good morning; Happy New Year; Trust your time over the holidays was well spent, and that you're refreshed and eager to see what God has in store for 2008
Originally intended to start right into our next series this morning, and forge ahead into new territory – instead, decided to push *pause*

Going back to last August, we've worked our way through 2 series thus far in our ministry year, with the theme of Get Serious
And as a way to guard against the “empty-head syndrome” where stuff goes in one ear and out the other . . .
I want to take stock of where we've been and what we've learned – ask the question, “Are You Serious? Are you applying what you're learning?”

So I'm going to jog your memory with some of the ground we've covered, and as I do . . .
I want you to examine your life, and assess how you're doing
Because that's exactly what Paul tells us to do in 2 Cor 13:5

- Paul is near the end of his second letter in as many years to the church in Corinth
And he wraps up by addressing their tendency to look at everyone else's walk, instead of their own
To measure everyone else's life, instead of their own life
So he says . . . *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

In other words . . .

Take your own temperature; Take your own pulse
Measure the fervor of your own walk before you measure that of someone else's
Or don't you realize *that Jesus Christ is in you?*
That you not only have the means to live a godly life, because of his power/presence
But you're without excuse if you don't
Unless of course, you're not saved in the first place – *you fail to meet the test*

But assuming you are – you have a responsibility to take stock of your life
To examine yourself; To test yourself to see if in fact you're serious in the faith
How else are we to know whether or not we're making progress from one year to next?
How else are we to measure our growth in Christ, if we don't test/examine ourselves periodically to see where we stand?
In order to do that – I have 8 questions for you to ask yourself, starting with . . .

Test #1 – Am I serious about godliness?

We started the ministry year with our theme of **Get Serious** from 1 Tim 4:7-8 . . .
The key phrase being – *Train yourself for godliness*; Get serious about it
Serious testing goes hand in hand with serious training

When it comes to godliness, the question is not – am I perfect; but am I striving?
Are you striving to be holy as God is holy?
Or are you just floating along, hoping your good intentions will carry the day?

In MO last weekend for my parents 50th wedding anniversary

Worshipped with them on Sunday – part of a country church of about 50
In that service, a few people gave their testimony of how God worked in their life in 07
So encouraged and struck by the fact that God is changing people's lives there, just like he's changing them here

One guy stood up and said 2007 was the best year and hardest year of his life
He started the year a bitter, angry, drunk
The worst father, husband, and man you could imagine
But as a result of giving his life to Christ, God has totally changed him . . .
Giving him a desire to be the *best* husband, *best* Dad, and a man of God
He's serious about godliness

I sat there praising God – because for some of you, that's your story
And I sat there praying to God – because for some of you, that needs to be your story
Are you serious about godliness? Test yourself

Test #2 – Am I serious about discipleship?

Are you passionate about knowing and loving God?
Unswervingly committed to the truth of his Word?
Single-minded in your pursuit of his purposes?
If so, you're a serious disciple; If not, you're a dabbler

Remember Mk 1, where we learned that salvation is free, but discipleship may cost you everything?
Salvation is a free gift of God as a result of his grace and your faith

But discipleship – becoming like Christ in knowledge, character, and deeds – may cost you everything
It may cost you your friends – because you no longer do the things they want to do
It may cost you your family – because they reject you for your beliefs
It may cost you your job – because you refuse to look the other way
It may cost you your comfort – because you're persecuted for your beliefs
It may cost you your life – because you take a stand for Christ

If you're serious about D, it may cost you *everything* – if it does, pay it
Pay it for the glory of God and the fame of his name
Pay it for the advance of the gospel and the sake of the lost
Pay it for the joy of your heart and the satisfaction of your soul
Pay it – you'll be glad you did
Are you serious about discipleship? Test yourself

Test #3 – Am I serious about worship?

We found from 2 Sam 6 where David brings the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, that worship is . . .
The joyful response of our heart when we focus on the awesome glory of God
It's both a duty *and* a delight – something we're told to do, and something we love to do
A responsibility *and* a privilege – something we must do, and something we get to do
A celebration *and* a reflection – sometimes loud/energetic, sometimes subdued/quiet
An event *and* a way of life – every Sunday it's an event we shouldn't miss
Every Monday, it s/b the song of our soul, playing through the speakers of our life

Anything less than that, and your life gets real bleak, real fast
Apart from worship, life and church and everything else, becomes a drudgery
It's just a joyless going-through-the-motions – there's no real purpose in all of it
That's why people who serve in one service but skip the other get burned out & lack joy
Because service without worship leads to drudgery
Life without worship leads to drudgery

Don't neglect the worship of God – on Sundays *or* Mondays
Divert your attention from lesser things if necessary; Fix your eyes on him
There's no greater joy – Am I serious about worship?

Test #4 – Am I serious about fellowship?

Not talking about small talk in the lobby; Or greeting one another after we sing
Talking about belonging together in mutual partnership – that's biblical fellowship
The *same* fellowship we find in early church, recorded in Acts 2 . . .
Where the first believers were so serious about it, they *devoted* themselves to it

Talking about sharing your life with others, and getting involved in theirs
Talking about growing *together* as a community of believers, not just growing larger
That's the fellowship we need to be serious about

And one of the best ways to cultivate such a thing, is to meet together in SG's . . .
Weekly gatherings of 6-16 people for the purpose of *fellowship*, godliness, and spiritual growth
There's no better way to cultivate the support, encouragement, and the accountability necessary to live your life pleasing to God

- Back in September I gave you 10 biblical reasons to get serious about SG's
The bottom line was – we'll never belong together in a biblical sense, if we don't meet together in a practical sense

If you're not plugged in to a SG, there's no better time than *now* to do so
Having just finished an overview of God's Word, and challenging you to get serious about it . . .
We're launching a 9 week study in all our SG's starting in Feb, called "How to Study the Bible"
It's excellent, it's practical, and it's critical for properly understanding the Word of God as you read/study it for yourself

If you're serious about fellowship, press on
If not, now is a great time to start

Test #5 – Am I serious about serving?

In Jg 6-7, we looked at the example of Gideon, one of Israel's leaders ~1150BC

We saw that we need to serve . . .

1. *Even if others aren't* – doing the right thing, without regard for who isn't
2. *Even if we lack the strength*
It's one of God's favorite tricks – to use weak, ordinary people, to accomplish extraordinary things

3. *Even if we're not qualified*
Just because you don't "have what it takes," doesn't mean God won't take what have
He's not looking for PhD's, a great resume, or a storehouse of knowledge
He's looking for willing servants to be used for his glory
4. *Even if we're afraid*
Because we can trust God just like Gideon did, to provide the comfort, encouragement, and help we need – at just the right time
5. *Even if we have doubts*
Putting our faith on the line that God will provide, as we obey
That's been the story of our church – and as God leads and blesses, it will continue to be our story
6. *Even if it doesn't make sense*
Sometimes the opp's that God gives you to serve are either completely overwhelming or entirely impossible – like saving Israel with 300 men against 135,000 of enemy
Are you serious about serving? Test yourself

Test #6 – Am I serious about prayer?

You are if you take advantage of it – confident that God hears you, answers you, helps you
And you are if you make time for it – as much as you need, on a consistent basis, no matter what, even when it's hard

Like Moses who spent 40 days/nights praying on Mt Sinai – as much time as he needed
Or Daniel, 3 times a day – on a consistent basis
Or Jesus – who got away to pray on a consistent basis, even when the crowds pressed for his attention
Or in the Garden of Gethsemane – he prayed even when it was hard
You're serious about prayer – if you take advantage of it; and make time for it

There was a second testimony in that little church service last week that I'll never forget
It was from an elderly woman named Goldie . . .
Who stood up and said that the only thing she wants for this year, is to spend *more* time with her Lord in prayer, than she did last
And in so doing, grow closer to him than she's ever been before

When I hear that from a woman who's walked with Jesus almost her entire life, and at the age of 92, wants nothing more than more – that spurs me on
Are you serious about prayer like that?

Test #7 – Am I serious about tithing?

Can't tell you . . .

How encouraged I've been with your stories/testimonies of how you've stepped out in faith to tithe, many of you for the first time in your life
How encouraged I am to see the change in your life because you've submitted your finances to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
How much it fuels me to see God provide for you, just like he promises
How much my faith has been strengthened to preach the word, when I see you respond like you have
It's not about me – but I want you to know how blessed I am, because of you . . .
Because so many of you are serious about tithing

- That wasn't always the case this year
We went through some thin, thin times financially this summer – gut-wrenching times
There were many weeks when we thought we weren't going to have enough to pay bills

Remember one week – forecasted a shortfall of several thousand dollars
And when the time came, we had \$100 left over
If that doesn't sound like a lot to you on a 1.7m budget, it's not
But *that* week, we were reminded like no other, that where God leads, he provides

With three 50k offerings in the month of December, a 100k offering last week . . .
And build-out funds that exceeded our need . . . provide he has
He answered our prayers with the best case scenario we ever dared ask

Because of that, we're finishing the year financially strong
And with the exception of our mortgage, we're going into 2008 unencumbered by any
remaining bills . . .
Eagerly anticipating, for the first time in months, what God is going to do

Thank you for getting serious about tithing
God bless you for giving sacrificially

Test #8 – Am I serious about the Word?

We spent a whole series on this; Question is, are you . . .
Serious like the Berean Jews who examined the Scriptures daily?
Serious like Ezra in the OT – who studied it, taught it, and did what it said?
Serious like the Psalmist who memorized it as a deterrent to sin?

If you remember, we looked at Ps 19, and found 9 benefits of getting serious about the
Word – including the fact that it . . .
Revives our soul; Informs our mind; Brings joy to our heart; Opens our eyes
Satisfies our desires; Exceeds our expectations
Have you experienced that? *Are* you experiencing that?
If so, you're serious about the Word; If not, you're missing out

Don't miss out on the joy of discovering biblical insights for yourself
Don't miss out on the excitement of seeing God through the pages of his Word, with
your own eyes
Don't settle for spiritual food that's been pre-packaged, pre-digested by others
Get serious about the Word yourself, and study it regularly

Check out one of the Bible reading plans on our website, and start reading
Plug in to one of the DC's you see in the bulletin this morning
Whatever you do, set aside time in your day, every day, to get serious about the Word

Are you serious?
If so, be encouraged to keep on keeping on
If not, this is your chance, at the beginning of the year, to start afresh and recover
some lost ground

And **communion** is as good a time as any to do so . . .

To examine yourself and reflect on your answers
To thank God for your strengths; Confess your failures
Commit to grow in your weaknesses

If that's your heart, and Jesus Christ is Lord of your life – join us
If not, let the bread and cup pass
Otherwise, the Bible says you risk bringing judgment on yourself because you're
participating in an unworthy manner
You're saying something outwardly that's not true inwardly

Instead, take the time to consider why you haven't given your life to the Lord
To consider why you're not serious about the things of God
And let the rest of us bear witness that we are, and blessed because of it

After we pray . . .
Distribute both the elements
When you're ready, take the bread individually – bearing witness to your personal
relationship with Christ
Hang on to the cup and we'll drink it together – bearing witness to the fact that we
belong together in mutual partnership, as the body of Christ

Jesus said that – *this cup is the new covenant in my blood*
This cup and what it contains is symbolic of the promise of salvation that Christ's
blood bought/guaranteed
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me

*As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he
comes.*
You proclaim that Jesus died for the sins of the world, especially your own – until he
comes again to receive you unto himself
That where he is, you may be also

Close

Be sure to join us next week for a new series . . .
Get Serious About Your Walk (where the rubber meets the road)
A verse by verse study of the book of James