

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Time-Tested Truths for Our Times

Unleashed (to serve Jesus)

(Colossians 4:17 and more)

Study #4

Introduction: Fundamental AND outside-the-box virtuosity...

The Big Fundamental. That was Tim Duncan's nickname when he played for the Spurs. Tim became a virtuoso of basketball's basics.

That virtuosity was the foundation of the Spurs' success for nineteen seasons and resulted in five Spurs NBA championships.

Others, like current superstars Luka Doncic, Steph Curry, and Giannis Antetokounmpo, have added outside-the-box virtuosity to their games. They haven't abandoned the fundamentals but have built on them.

These outside-the-box virtuosities have enabled these players to make dramatic impacts on the game.

In basketball, great impact can be made by focusing on the fundamentals AND by an outside-the-box focus.

Today, we're going to see from the New Testament that believers in Jesus are invited to make impact for Jesus by serving in fundamental, essential, basic ministries AND in outside-the box ministries.

Review and preview...

In these weeks we are looking at time-tested, biblical truths that are especially fit for our own times.

We have so far considered the continuing relevance of the inspired Word of God, the power of deeper than surface level relating, and the wonder of diversity in the body of Christ. Last Sunday we saw that God wants us to make impact for Him "disproportionate to size" as we ask Him to do what only He can do.

Today, we're looking at another time-tested truth.

Our focus this morning is on the beauty of God's plan for each of us to be "on mission" for Jesus. We're going to see and celebrate one truth: God wants all of us who have come to know Jesus by faith to be involved in service for Jesus.

The crux of the message for today is based on a comment the Apostle Paul made about one of my favorite biblical characters. Paul made this comment near the end of his letter to the church in Colossae.

After some concluding well-wishes to some friends in the church, Paul sent a highly individualized message to one man, Archippus.

A Christian On a Mission: Archippus (Colossians 4:17)

[17] Tell Archippus, "See to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, so that you may fulfill it."

Who was Archippus?

This Archippus is mentioned in only one other place in the New Testament. When Paul wrote a brief letter to his friend, Philemon, he referred to Archippus as ***[Philemon 2] our fellow soldier.***

From this we know that Archippus lived in Colossae, and we gather that he was a faithful follower of Christ. Beyond that, we know nothing about Archippus.¹

Here in Colossians, though, Paul mentions Archippus' "**ministry**." And we wonder, "*What ministry was that?*"

Identifying the Ministry of Archippus

One of my books suggests that Archippus gave pastoral oversight to the church in Colossae (Herbert Carson). Maybe. But there is nothing in the biblical data we have about Archippus to suggest that.

Another couple of scholars believe that he could have been an evangelist. Again, maybe. But, again, nothing leads us to that conclusion.

Archippus' ministry is left undefined.

The word Paul used to describe his ministry is a word that is often translated simply, "service" (*diakonia*). It is not a "stained-glass" word that has to describe official or formal or liturgical ministry.²

Archippus' ministry / service could have involved preaching, leading music, serving the poor, or evangelizing.

One of my more honest books says, "*It is difficult to be precise as to the particular form of ministry which had been committed to him.*"

I'll go you one better than that. It is not just difficult. It is *impossible* to know what ministry Archippus had received in the Lord.

¹ One commentator (Abbott) thinks that Archippus may have been the son of Philemon, the man to whom the letter (Philemon) was written. But there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that.

² There is another Greek word for that: leitourgia. (Greek: *λειτουργια*)

I'm confident that Archippus knew and the church in Colossae knew exactly what Paul was referring to when he mentioned his "**ministry**." But readers from the first century on haven't had a clue.

He might have had a ministry among the poor or the slave classes. He might have had a ministry to children, to lepers, or to the aristocracy. He might have been a teacher in the church, or a discipler of young converts.

It could have been anything. And Paul told Archippus, this faithful soldier of Jesus, to fulfill the ministry which he has "**received in the Lord**."

We hear those words again, and we wonder, again...

Paul's Words to Archippus - and YOU!

Was Paul sending a warning - "*Tell Archippus to get busy and fulfill his ministry!*" In other words, was he scolding Archippus for NOT seeing to it that his ministry was getting done?

Or was Paul honoring Archippus by affirming that he had been given a ministry and was fulfilling it?

We don't know. The verse is provocative. It prompts more questions than it answers. This comment about this man is the launch point for the rest of what I have to say this morning.

Paul's comment also gives voice to one of a few select, biblical ideas on which I hang my hopes that this current chapter of our church's life will be more God-honoring and more impactful than any we've ever known.

Here is that idea:

If Archippus - a man mentioned only briefly in the New Testament - received a ministry from God and was urged by Paul to fulfill it, doesn't it

follow that every believer in Jesus has received a ministry from God and needs to “*see to it*” that it is fulfilled?

I mean, if Archippus received a ministry in the Lord, why not us in 2023? Why not everybody at Northwest? Why not you?

Why not accept the idea that Jesus has a position for you to play, a place on His team, a ministry to fulfill?

It is quite an overwhelming thought that Jesus has work for you to do - but if He had work for Archippus to do, why not you?

In our time together this morning, I want to talk from the Bible about ministry, and develop some thoughts that spring from this idea that you are a direct descendant of our first-century brother, Archippus.

First, a thought about identity. How are you, a believer in Jesus, to think of yourself? The Apostle Peter gives us his thoughts about this.

When he wrote to first-century Christians, this is how he wanted them to think about themselves.

A Christian’s Ministry Identity (1 Peter 2:9)

[1 Peter 2:9] But you are A CHOSEN PEOPLE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.³

³ See also Hebrews 13:15-16; Romans 15:15-16 for references to believers in Jesus being priests to God and fulfilling priestly function, but not as in the Old Testament. The idea is that Christians serve in a priestly way as they serve God by serving people in Jesus’ Name. Also, Revelation 5:10.

Peter told them that they, together, made up a royal priesthood to God. It follows that we who believe in Jesus are to think of ourselves as priests to God, too.⁴

When we speak of “the priesthood of all believers” we mean that every Christian:

- has the privilege of praying directly to God without needing to go through a human intermediary (like a priest).
- is gifted by the indwelling Holy Spirit to understand and to apply Scripture without the aid of a church authority.⁵
- has a special call to ministry.

The idea that those who have come to know Christ by faith are priests to God comes right out of Scripture.

So, yes, it is true that since I am a priest to God, I have a call to ministry. I seek to fulfill my call to a pastoral ministry.

It is just as true that YOU have been appointed a priest to God and that YOU have a call to ministry.

As a priest, you are to serve God by using your own gifts and passions to serve people in Jesus’ Name.

There is nothing like knowing that you can be lovingly involved, up close and personal, at the pointy end of the spear, on the front lines, in God’s plan for advancing His kingdom.

There is no life like the life given to Jesus’ mission. God wants to deploy you into that mission.

⁴ This teaching was one of the pillars of the Protestant Reformation.

⁵ Martin Luther argued that since all believers are under our High Priest, Jesus, we are each responsible for our own spiritual life in the community of the church.

We make an invalid distinction between Christians when we speak of some as “ministers” and some not. All are ministers (i.e., Jesus’ priests, serving others in His Name)

In Christ, there are no mission NOBODIES. In Christ, everybody is a mission SOMEBODY.⁶

Paul says to each of us this morning, just as he told the Colossian church to tell Archippus, [*Colossians 4:17*] ***“See to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, so that you may fulfill it.”***

That full engagement in ministry doesn’t normally happen instantly. There is a typical run-up from the point of conversion to engagement in ministry, and it often goes something like this.

A Christian’s Growth Trajectory

Step One: Attendance

A new believer will start attending church. And attending church is a good thing. (You’re not surprised that I would say that.)

So, I’m glad you’re here, whether you are a regular attender or a relative newcomer to Northwest or to church, generally.

I’m glad if you are viewing online if viewing online is as close as you can come to being here. I’m grateful for our online attenders.

But attending isn’t the end goal for the believer in Jesus.

Woody Allen is credited with saying, *“80% of success is just showing up.”* Not for the Christian. Showing up isn’t Mission: Accomplished. There is more on Jesus’ heart than that we attend.

Step Two: Connection

After a while of attending church, we hope that you will get plugged into community and that you will grow as a worshipping disciple.

It is Jesus’ desire that you fully enter into our worship times together. And it is God’s plan that you will form relationships that soon spill over from Sunday into the rest of your week. All of this is you, taking your next steps with Jesus.

And, by the way, this order can be and often is, reversed.

Frequently, someone gets to know someone from the church, develops a friendship, enjoys relational connection with them, and then will begin attending church, again, taking next steps all along the way.

Either way, attending regularly, forming relationships, and taking part in worship are all wonderful and important.

But, doing all of them is not crossing the goal line. All these elements, absent service, apart from ministry output, is not a kingdom win.

No, once you come to church and start taking next steps with Jesus, the church is to be your launch pad into service.

Step Three: Serve

Service, generally

⁶ I am deeply indebted to Frank Tillapaugh, former pastor of Bear Valley Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado, who wrote *The Church Unleashed*, a book that inspired me with a vision for “unleashing” many years ago with these concepts.

As Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, everyone who believes in Jesus is saved to serve.

[Ephesians 4:11] And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, [12] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry...

We don't know all the ways in which ministry happened in the first century. But ***"the work of ministry"*** would have at least involved things like serving widows and the poor, teaching and leading in the church, and spreading the Gospel to those who don't yet know Jesus.

It is much easier for us to talk about ***"the work of ministry"*** in 2023. We can see all kinds of ministries going on all around us and can jump into these ministries that we see.

Serving in ministries led by the church leadership

Some Christians will mostly fulfill the mission of service by carrying out ministries led by the Elders and staff at a church. In this case, here at our church.

If you have giftings and passions to serve within the church, GREAT. You will bless people by your service here.

I think that Jesus loves it when someone serves within the church, and as a part of the ministries led by the church leadership. Paul would have applauded this kind of service in a church. I'm sure happy for the service happening here and am grateful to the many servants here.

Serving in the church is basic and essential. It is fundamental and necessary. If you're serving in the church, you are Tim Duncan. By your faithful service in these ministries, God is using you to make impact, to touch lives, to make a difference.

But...if we who are here at Northwest were to fill every ministry slot here (we're not there yet) there would still be lots of us here NOT deployed into service here because there are more people here than there are service slots in our Elder and staff-led ministries.

Additionally, if our only aim is to fill every service position at our church, we won't make much progress in reaching a needy city and world for Jesus.

You who are serving Jesus in the church are serving those who are here. That's GREAT and NECESSARY.

You are providing a sturdy foundation that helps other Christ-followers move forward in their walks with Jesus. You are enhancing worship and relational connection. You are helping to equip others to live faithfully for Jesus.

But there are lots of ways in which you might serve Jesus outside of the box of the Elder and staff led ministries of the church.

Serving in ministries God puts on your heart

I'm making a distinction between those ministries that are started, led, and managed by the Elders and staff here at church and those ministries that are started, led and managed by you, someone in whom the Spirit of God also dwells.

You may have an idea that will help those in the church in some way that's never been imagined by the Elders or staff. Or, you may have an idea for serving and blessing people who don't now and may never attend our church.

These are Steph Curry and Luka Doncic outside-the-box ways to serve Jesus. Like Elder and staff led ministries in a church, they make kingdom impact and are also GREAT and NECESSARY.

All of us to a certain extent, and some of us for the most part, will serve Jesus in ministries other than those led by the Elders and staff. You'll serve Jesus at home, at work, in the neighborhood, in the community, and globally.

But in Jesus, everybody is to be "on mission." Nobody on the sidelines. Everybody in the ministry game.

And just think of the vast array of options available to you when it comes to serving Jesus.⁷

A Christian's Service Options

Everybody Serves

Serving in the church

Your primary service for Jesus might involve any of the Elder- and staff-led ministries of the church.

You might teach or lead or give or clean-up and set-up and take-down or provide music or cook or organize or care for babies or work digital magic or lead a small group - and so much more. God bless you!

For all of us, serving Jesus will involve prayer and building relationships.⁸

⁷ How will you discover where you might best serve Jesus? I suggest listening. LISTEN to those who tell you about needs - theirs or the needs of others. This is important info to factor into where you might invest time and energy and money. LISTEN to friends who tell you, "You're really good at this!" or "You could help people in this area." - that could be a clue as to where you might serve. LISTEN to your life's story. We are all uniquely gifted to serve. The talents and skills and interests you have may direct you into a service that fits. LISTEN to where your own heart prompts you to serve and to brokenness that breaks your heart. Those heart-felt nudges could be what God uses to drive you into a particular arena of ministry.

Many, many people find their ministry "sweet spot" by plugging into service here. I would invite you to check out any of these ministries at Northwest. Call the contact person listed in the program or call the church office to get more information about any of them.

But there are so many other ways to serve Jesus. If you adopt a mindset that says, "I want to serve in Jesus' Name" a whole world of opportunities will open up to you.

Serving in your daily life

- Take a meal to a new neighbor or bring food where there has been sickness. That's MINISTRY.
- Visit a co-worker or a friend in the hospital. That is MINISTRY.
- Help a discouraged friend by lending a listening ear. That is MINISTRY.
- Urge someone you know to take a next step with Jesus on the path of obedience. That is MINISTRY.
- Take a few minutes to point a friend to Jesus is MINISTRY.

Many of you are involved in these kinds of activities all the time.

You may not have ever thought of them as "ministries," but, carried out with a passion to press Jesus into all these services, they are exactly what New Testament ministry is all about.

When Paul wrote that Christians were to ***[Titus 3:14] learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs***, these are the sorts of things he had in mind. Tangible expressions of love and care.

⁸ We believe that certain ministries are the particular responsibility of the church leadership. Worship services, Sunday School, youth ministry, and adult small group are examples of these kinds of ministry. They are overseen or led by Elders or staff. We are calling these Core Ministries and they are managed by the Elders and staff.

Ministry need not be grandiose or flashy to be impactful. Under the radar and behind the scenes service IS Kingdom-of-God sized stuff.

Or you might discover existing ministries in San Antonio where you could plug in and serve. For instance...

Serving with existing ministries

Over the years, many people from Northwest have served at crisis pregnancy centers, and have served women, their unborn babies, and these babies' fathers. Volunteering to serve at a crisis pregnancy center is a great way to serve Jesus by serving people. (Check out today's program to find out more about an opportunity along these lines.)

Some have served the Lord at military bases. They have assisted chaplains, attended and helped with base chapel services, been hospitable to servicemen and women at holidays, and helped them take next steps with Jesus.

And there's more.

Destino is a nationwide ministry that reaches out to Latino college students. There is an active chapter of Destino here in San Antonio.⁹ If your heart stirs to look into this, Gene Muckleroy is looking for partners. If you don't have Gene's contact information, call the church office and we'll help you get in touch with Gene.

There are other, formal ministries here in San Antonio that serve Afghan refugees, international students, victims of sex trafficking, those with drug and alcohol addictions - all in Jesus' Name.

Is your heart stirring? Want information? Give the church a call this week - or call me - and we'll do what we can to help you take the first step of finding out more and will pray with you about how you might serve Jesus in any of these arenas.

So, you might choose to jump on board with something that is already up and running. Or the Lord might put it on your heart to initiate some entirely new way to serve and to push Jesus' purposes forward.

It's certainly happened before...

Creating new ministries

I have long been impressed (no longer surprised) at the capacity for creativity living in the hearts of Jesus followers when it comes to finding ways to serve as salt and light in the world.

As a "for instance," I'll tell you about Bread and Water.

Bread & Water

Bread and Water was birthed in the hearts of a few High School and then college students nearly fifteen years ago here at Northwest. It was a ministry of love to some of our city's most vulnerable adults.

From the beginning, the goal of Bread and Water was to lavish value and love on homeless men and women. These students simply wanted to provide some food and conversation in Jesus' Name. So, they did.

These teenagers gave great leadership to Bread and Water for several years. After a while Ken Eberhardt took the reins, until his health failed. Not long after, the formal effort of Bread and Water ceased.

During the time that Bread and Water was a ministry here, the leaders never asked for anything from the church except recognition, prayer, and a bit of guidance from time to time. No one was ever made to feel guilty for not being involved. People served whose hearts stir them to do so.

⁹ Destino is a ministry arm of Cru. (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ)

Over the years, many of the recipients of Bread and Water's ministry experienced God's love through those who serve. Several came to faith in Christ.

For years, many of our Bread and Water friends came to church, sang and learned and worshiped and grew in Christ. We had quite a few very meaningful memorial services for those who passed away, made lots of great connections, and had lots of opportunities to love.

And here's the thing. Bread and Water wasn't thought up by or led by Elders or staff. You, members of the Body here, thought it up, organized it, and led it. This has been the case with numerous ministries.

More...

- **Food Pantry**

Our church's Food Pantry exists to serve those with food insecurities in our city. The current leaders of this ministry are Robert and Kathy Treadwell PLUS lots of people who donate groceries or money every month. We give away a bunch of groceries through our food pantry. And you can help with the packing party after the second service today!

- **English as a Second Language**

We never had an *English as a Second Language* ministry here until Jennifer Robison expressed interest in starting one. It launched in 2017 and has continued (all through covid-19 via Zoom) to provide a service to people who need to learn English.

- **Bethesda**

Thomas and Cj Howard had a heart to serve those who are recovering from harmful habits and started what they call "Bethesda." They meet on Friday evenings with anyone who wants to travel the road to recovery with Jesus.

- **Missions Prayer**

Our church supports a good number of faithful, God-loving missionaries who serve Jesus all over the globe. Arden Walde thought it would be great to have more regular contact with them. So, a couple of years ago, Arden began and has led a monthly Zoom meeting with these missionaries and anyone who wants to gather in the Welcome Center on the first Saturday of every month.

These are by no means all the outside-the-box (or "Unleashed") ministries that are going on around here. But these illustrate that our church is shaped both by the ministries that are led by the Elders and staff AND by the ministries arising from the hearts of all who are a part here.

We don't expect that all ministry ideas will - or should! - come from the leadership. No, the Spirit of God directs each of us, just like He did Archippus, into life-changing, Gospel-centered, Kingdom-of-God advancing ministry.

And by this direction God allows Northwest to serve Jesus beyond our own church walls as we focus on Kingdom of God impact rather than on how many people attend Northwest.

Conclusion:

If you are currently involved in an essential, fundamental, Tim Duncan ministry here at Northwest that is led by the Elders or staff, we know of your service and pray for you regularly. But it is possible that you are involved in an outside-the-box, impactful Steph Curry ministry that none of us here even know about.

Would you please let us know what you're doing to be on mission so that we can pray for you and cheer you on in what you are doing for Jesus?

Here's a 2023 rendition of today's main verse: " (you!) *see to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, so that you may fulfill it!*"