

## **New Year New Start, Part 6**

*1 Corinthians 9:18-24*

**1. Give up our freedom.**

- *John 8:36; Galatians 5:18; Romans 9:3; Galatians 5:13;*  
*Matthew 5:17*

**2. Give up our rules.**

- *1 Corinthians 10:31-33, 9:21*

**3. Give away our Savior.**

- *Philippians 1:12-13, 20-25*

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**West Valley Church**  
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**Michael W. O'Neill**

## **New Year, New Start 2021**

### **Part Six**

Jose Ortiz lives in Oakland, California, and is a community organizer in the Fruitvale District. He was concerned about the adversarial relationship between the Oakland Police Department and the community, especially the town's Latino members. In the 80s and 90s, the Fruitvale District swarmed with lowriders.

Where ever the lowriders rolled and bounced, the law followed or preceded – they'd just stay in one corner and write a ticket to every lowrider that drove by.

Jose wanted to change the relationship, so he began talking to a very good friend of his – Oakland police officer Miguel Soto. As the two friends began to dream, they got an idea of what they could do. First Ortiz started with the lowrider community. They formed a club that would remove graffiti, clean up city dumping, feed the homeless, gave toys to low income children and Christmas gifts to impoverished families. They pushed the drug dealers and bad enemies out of the parks.

Then one day, Ortiz got the tragic news that his good friend, Officer Soto, was killed on duty after being gunned down at an intersection. Ortiz was devastated. But then he got an idea to honor his friend. He asked the Oakland Police Department if their lowrider club could use Officer Soto's old police cruiser; a standard issue 1991 crown Victoria police sedan. And here's the result:

Ortiz and his fellow lowriders dedicated their time, money, and energy into the transformation of Soto's squad car, which they equipped with hydraulic suspension, ten switches with front and back side-to-side three wheel motion, 13 inch wheels with 18 karat gold plated spokes, a lush stereo system, and functioning police sirens and lights. On the front of the driver's side door, just below the handle, sits a painted cursive inscription that reads: *In honor of Miguel Soto.*

Ortiz said, "The Oakland police had no tools to connect with kids. We did. And when we built the police low rider it was an immediate success." Before the low rider was built, he says, kids would ask the police negative questions like, "How many bullets are in your gun? Have you ever shot somebody?" And now kids see the low rider and they come up to police and ask, "What kind of sound system is that? What kinds of tires are these? Tell me about the hydraulics..."

The low rider has given police officers a chance to show Oakland youth that they are human, that "a gun, uniform, badge, bullet proof jacket is part of the job, but behind the badge and uniform is a human being, with feelings; a parent, grandparent, uncle, brother, sister, auntie." said Ortiz.

The Oakland low rider police car was the first one in the nation. Ortiz has helped police forces replicate his original low rider from Dallas to Ft. Lauderdale to San Diego, and in Europe, Canada and Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup>

This is a great story of someone who was willing to do whatever it took to reach the community around him, and it has resulted in much-needed change for the better. And that reminds me of someone else: the Apostle Paul. Paul would do anything and everything to introduce people to Jesus.

Last week, we talked about the fact that every single one of us is here to make a difference in this world. Every Christian can and should make an eternal difference in the lives of others, by advancing the Kingdom of God's love and introducing others to Jesus Christ. I preached about that from a great passage of Scripture where Paul inspires us to run this race for all we are worth, with all the energy we have and all the energy Christ gives us through the Holy Spirit. Remember that Paul said we ought to run to win. Today, in the last of our sermons in the series, "New Year, New Start," we are going to see *why* Paul ran the race to win, what it means to "run the race," and why he disciplined his life. Here's why – it was for this one goal: to introduce other people to Jesus. And *that* is to be the same driving goal of every follower of Jesus. We'll see that in the passage right before the one we read last week. Would you stand with me as I read it today?

This is from 1 Corinthians 9:18b-24...

"I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News. Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!..." (1 Corinthians 9:18b-24, nlt)

Thank you for honoring God's Word by standing; you can be seated. This is an incredible passage of Scripture that explains what "running to win" means: introducing people to Jesus – which is to be the same priority for *every* follower of Christ. That passage can be a little hard to understand, so we're going to unpack it and learn how to apply it to our own lives. But to help us with it, I want to first read it from another translation of the Bible, called the Message. This won't be on the screens, so I'd like to ask you to simply listen closely to what it says. This is how the Message Bible translates the passage:

"Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oaklandnorth.net/2014/10/24/opd-squad-car-of-fallen-officer-revamped-into-oaklands-first-police-low-rider/>

religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be *in* on it!" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23, tmt)

Paul was willing to do whatever it took to introduce people to Jesus – so much so, that he felt his life in Christ could not be separated from telling others the Good News of God's Love; Paul says that to *not* share the Good News meant that he himself would miss out on the Good News. Think about that, Christian: if you don't tell people about God's love, you might miss out on God's love!

Folks, if we are going to lean into and live out all the fulness that God has for us in this year, if our lives are filled the Holy Spirit, if we are going to make the difference in this world that God intends for us to make, *our priority is going to be introducing people to Jesus Christ*. It means we will come to the end of 2021, whether we are wearing masks or not, we will come to the end of 2021 having made it our top priority to introduce people to Jesus. And we can do that whether there is a pandemic or not, no matter who is president or not. In fact, those things might actually make folks even more hungry to meet Jesus. So let's see if we can learn from Paul what we have to do in order to get this right.

First, it means you and I need to...

### **1. Give up our freedom.**

Paul said, "Even though I am a free man and a slave to no one, I make myself a slave to everyone and anyone in order to win as many as possible to Christ."

Remember that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth. And the Christians in Corinth were making a big deal about their freedom; they were so thrilled that they had freedom in Christ that they weren't going to let anyone tell them what to do. In fact, they felt like they were so free that they could commit any sin they wanted to. There was a guy in their church who was having sex with his step-mother, and the church was bragging about that! They were so focused on their freedom that they were destroying their witness and preventing people from meeting Jesus. So Paul is saying in essence, "Your priority is *not* yourself! It is *not* your freedom! Your priority is to belong to Jesus and to do whatever it takes to share the Good News with someone else. You have all kinds of freedoms, but you should be willing to give it all up if it will help someone become a Christian."

Now, the fact is, when you became a Christian, you were set free – truly free. After all, Jesus said:

"So if the Son sets you free, you truly are free." (John 8:36, nlt)

So you don't have to worry about all the different religious laws and rules anymore. You were set free from sin, and you were set free from trying to live up to the religious rules and laws.

Let me put it this way: it's like the speed limit on I-90. Before you were a Christian, you wanted to go 80 mph, but you were afraid to get a ticket, so you did your best to go the speed limit. But on those long stretches between Ellensburg and Spokane, it was just so hard to go that slow! But then you became a Christian, and it's like your cruise control was set at 70. You don't have to worry about looking out for cops because you are not under the law anymore; you *automatically* go the speed limit. In fact, it's not the law that makes you do it; it's your desire to drive at a safe and reasonable speed because you don't want to put anyone at risk.

When we become Christians, *we are not free to sin; we are free not to sin!* Paul said in Galatians 5:18...

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:18, niv)

...*we are not free to sin; we are free not to sin!*

Does that make sense so far? So if that is true, then why would Paul say I need to give up my freedom? Here's why: because as great as my freedom is, if giving it up is what it takes for you to know Jesus, it is worth it to me! This is why Paul said:

“For my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.” (Romans 9:3, nlt)

He was willing to be condemned under the law himself if it meant that the Jews could be free in Christ. That's how much he wanted them to be saved.

You see, even though I am free, I am not free to do whatever I want. Paul also said:

“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.” (Galatians 5:13, nlt)

That's what our freedom is for: I am *now* free to introduce others to Jesus.

Paul recognized that the unsaved Jews were people who were still living under the law, which was only proving how condemned they were. Even though Paul knew that a person who is a Christian is free from the Law, yet he also knew that the law served a purpose. In fact, it is the law that proves that we need Jesus; by trying to obey the law, we realize that we can never obey the law in our own strength, so we need Christ to set us free. So Paul was sympathetic to the Jews. For sure he wasn't going to badmouth them because they were legalistic. Instead, he respected where they were, but wanted more than anything to show them how much Christ could help them. That's why Jesus said that he didn't come to get rid of the law – he came to fulfill it! (Matthew 5:17)

Paul was happy to submit to the Jewish laws, if that meant that he could build a relationship with his Jewish friends and gain their respect and then get to talk to them about Jesus. Paul was willing to do anything and everything it took to help people meet Jesus – anything and everything – unless it would violate his Christian values.

Let me give you this as an example: We've come through a difficult political season, and it's not over yet. People are still as politically polarized as ever. So let me ask you this, Republican: are you willing to work hard to truly understand and respect the Democrats

you know, so you can gain their respect and introduce them to Jesus? Democrats: are you willing to work hard to truly understand and respect Republicans so that you can gain their respect and introduce them to Jesus? If not, you are not participating in the Gospel. If you think it's your job to convince the other side how wrong and stupid they are, you are not acting like a Christian. Are you obsessed with your side being "right?" If you are a Republican, you should be willing to become a Democrat if it means that you could introduce them to Jesus. The same is true if you are a Democrat. In fact, I would gladly give up my rights as stated by the constitution, if it meant someone else could know Jesus. You and I should be willing to do *anything* in order to gain the opportunity to introduce someone to Jesus.

Not only should we be willing to give up our freedom, we also must be willing to...

## 2. Give up our *rules*.

Wait – give up *what* rules? Didn't we just get done talking about all the freedom we have in Christ? Well, let me explain. Paul said that not only did he become like one under the law to reach those under the law, he also became like one *without* any law in order to reach those folks, too.

When he talked about folks who were under the law, he was talking about his fellow Jews. When he talks about people who are not under the law, he is talking about Gentiles. The Jews struggled under the law but couldn't ever fully obey it, and that only proved that they needed Jesus because the law that they needed to keep actually condemned them because they couldn't keep it. Right? But with the Gentiles, they didn't even know how lost they were, because they didn't even have the law to show them wrong from right. So Paul became like the Gentiles in order to reach them, too. He would do anything – short of violating his Christian values – to gain the opportunity to introduce them to Jesus.

So, for instance, Jews refused to eat meat that had first been offered to idols. It was considered unclean. But the Gentiles would first offer it to their idols and then feast on it. Paul would sit down at a meal with Gentiles and happily eat that meat that was served to him. That was scandalous to Jews. But Paul wasn't willing to let that get in the way of introducing people to Jesus – that insignificant rule was worth giving up in order to get the chance to tell people about God's Love for them. That's why Paul said:

“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; *I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.*” (1 Corinthians 10:31-33, nlt. *Italics added*)

So how does that apply to us? Well I think most of us have rules that we've followed that are important to us. For instance, folks who have grown up in the church have grown up with certain rules, like, “you can't smoke, drink, chew, go with girls who do, you can't go to movies or dance or go with boys who play games of chance.” Right? And there were good intentions behind those rules – they began with the best of intentions, but they've become rules that some Christians will keep to the detriment of introducing someone to Jesus. We'd rather stick to our rules than break them if it would build relationship with a non-Christian.

Let me press a little harder: some Christians have such strong feelings and convictions about people in the LGBTQIA community: they refuse to be around them, as if they would somehow make them unclean. Or these folks think that becoming friends with a gay person is somehow condoning their lifestyle. But remember Paul said in verse 21 of that passage:

“When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 9:21, nlt)

In other words, “I won’t disobey Christ in the important issues, but everything else is not as important as becoming friends with someone so that I might demonstrate God’s love to them.”

Can I push just a little harder? Some of us have preconceived ideas that maybe we were born with, or maybe we acquired from others, but for many people, we don’t even realize we have them. Here’s what I’m talking about: some of us who are white have certain perspectives or attitudes about people who are brown or black. Our community of West Valley is made up of mostly either white or Latino folks. But many people who are white have negative attitudes about those who are brown. And the same thing holds true of those who are brown and their attitudes about whites. Plus, it doesn’t help when there are language barriers and cultural differences.

And I see many white Christians who do not want Latinos in their church, let alone do anything to reach out to them. So these folks don’t like that we have bilingual publications and bilingual lyrics on the screen and that we sometimes sing songs in Spanish.

And, to be fair, I see many Latinos who find it easier to worship with their own kind. So Sunday morning at church becomes the most segregated place in West Valley. Listen: *This Cannot Be*. We are to be the church – made up of people from every tribe and nation and language. Paul would say, “To the Latinos I became as a Latino, and to the Anglos I became as an Anglo. I became all things to all people so that by all means I might introduce people to Jesus.”

Besides race and ethnicity, there are differences in generations, too. People of one generation must be willing to be open to the things that will reach a different generation. Paul would say, “To the Gen-Zers I became as a Gen-Z, and to the Boomers I became as a Boomer, so that by all means I might see Gen-Zers and Boomers know Jesus!” If we are going to obey Scripture, it means we’ve got to do whatever it takes to reach young people in our community, and older people.

Theologian Helmut Thielicke said, “The gospel must be preached afresh and told in new ways to every generation, since every generation has its own unique questions. The gospel must constantly be forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence.”<sup>2</sup>

Listen, my friends: this is *us* in West Valley. There are unchurched young adults right next door in the apartments. There are unchurched Hispanic people that make up a third to a

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<sup>2</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Leadership*, Vol. 6, no. 1.

half of our West Valley community. You and I must be willing to do whatever it takes so that by all means we might see some saved.

We've got to be willing to give up our freedom, and willing to give up our rules (and our comfort), in order to...

### **3. Give away our Savior.**

Paul said "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

Why would I be willing to give up my freedom? So others can know Jesus. Why would I be willing to give up my rules, my traditions, my comforts? So others can know Jesus. That's what Paul lived for, and what he was willing to die for: to introduce people to Jesus. The standard is no less for *every* Christian. That's why Paul wrote the following to the church in Philippi; he was in prison for telling others about Jesus, so he wrote this letter from prison. Here's some of what he said:

"I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here *has helped to spread the Good News*. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.

I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith." (Philippians 1:12-13, 20-25, nlt)

If we live, we live to introduce people to Jesus. If we die, our legacy leads people to Jesus and we get to be with Jesus. Whether we live or die, it is for Jesus – that others will be introduced to him through our lives, and through our deaths.

If I am not willing to give up my freedom, my focus is on me, and I won't be any help to those who don't know Jesus. If I'm not willing to give up my rules or traditions or comforts, my focus is on those things, and how they are violating them. But if I can give up those things, I will be willing to do whatever it takes to give away my Savior – which is who people really need.

Let me close with this story: Roger Storms, pastor of First Christian Church in Chandler, Arizona, tells this story: "One Sunday, a car had broken down in the alley behind our church, and the driver had jacked up the car and crawled underneath to work on the problem. Suddenly, we heard him scream for help. The jack had slipped, and the car had come down on top of him. Someone shouted, 'Call 9-1-1!' and a couple of people ran for the phone. Several of our men gathered around the large car and strained to lift it off the trapped man. Nurses from our congregation were rounded up and brought to the scene. Somehow the



men were able to ease the car's weight off the man and he was pulled free. Our nurses checked him over. He was scratched up and shaken, but otherwise okay.

"When this man was in danger, people did all they could to help--risking themselves, inconveniencing themselves. Whatever was necessary to save this man, they were ready to try. How we need this same attitude when it comes to rescuing those in greatest danger--the danger of losing life eternally!"

Give up your freedom, give up your rules or traditions or comfort or prejudices, so you can give away your Savior. That is what a Christian lives for, and dies doing.

*Pray*

*Benediction:*

I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God (*and, I might add, introduce others to Christ!*). (Philippians 1:9-11, nlt. *Italics are my words*)

Go, do whatever it takes, to introduce people to Jesus.