

Erwin Lutzer tells the following story from an eyewitness in Germany during the Holocaust.

“I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it because what could we do to stop it. A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance, and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars. Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews in route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us. We knew the time the train was coming, and when we heard the whistle blow, we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.” And then the eyewitness shared with Pastor Lutzer, *“ Although years have passed, I still hear the train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me, forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.”*

This is the third in a series of messages designed to call us to a sense of mission and calling in our lives.

Every one of us who are attempting to follow in Christ’s steps will sooner or later come to a place where we will need to be involved in serving Christ through serving others.

This step in our walk of faith can often be intimidating and cause us to have moments of fear at stepping out into the unknown.

The simple fact is God calls us and commands us to live lives of discipleship.

Over the last fifty to seventy-five years the Western or American church has often become very focused on itself. Much of what is done around the church seems to be done to serve the internal body of believers instead of the perishing world and people of the culture outside the church. We have too often been so focused on ourselves, our wants and desires that serving out culture doesn’t ever become a part of some individual’s lives.

The greatest challenge for most churches is to try to understand that the mission Christ gave them to do doesn’t include them liking it or it being about their preferences. It is about sharing the message of Christ in a dark world. We are to be light.

You cannot be a Christ-follower and not live and exist in the spirit of Jesus.

He was always about lost people (explain)

Everything Jesus did infuriated the church and reached out to the unchurched.

He made them mad when He went to the temple and made them mad when he went to parties where drunks and prostitutes hung out.

Jesus said, *“I came to seek and to save that which was lost.”*

When He left this earth, He left us with the charge and the mission to follow His example of reaching and ministering to lost people.

To accomplish this, He has gifted every one of us with gifts and abilities that enable us to engage in ministry to others.

The scriptural background that we have been using for this series revolves around the beginning days of ministry in the life of the prophet Elisha.

He was plowing in a field one day when the old prophet Elijah walked by and through his mantle over him. Elisha immediately began to make preparations to follow and serve Elijah as an attendant. He served God by serving Elijah. I pointed out to you that from the time of his calling until the scripture that we will read in a few moments there is no mention of Elisha in any of the stories of Elijah. He was serving faithfully but not in the limelight.

There came a day when God decided it was time for Elijah’s work to be over. That brings us to today’s Bible reading.

It is found in II Kings 2: 7-14

Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River. ⁸ Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

⁹ When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away.”

And Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor.”

¹⁰ “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah replied. “If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”

¹¹ As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!” And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his clothes in distress.

¹³ Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak, which had fallen when he was taken up. Then Elisha returned to the bank of the Jordan River. ¹⁴ He struck the water with Elijah’s cloak and

cried out, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" Then the river divided, and Elisha went across. 2 Kings 2:11-14 NLT

You and I stand on the brink of our own Jordan. For many of us God has been speaking and we have been trying to listen to what He is calling us to do.

I think probably many of us can relate to what Elisha must have been feeling when he turned around by himself to face the ministry that God was calling him to. Remember he had never been in the public eye before and now there are fifty prophets standing off in the distance watching to see what he is going to do.

In next week's sermon, which will be the final one in the series, we will look very closely at what Elisha did and more importantly how he did it.

For today I want us to one more time focus on how God wants us to attempt to do something for Him.

We do what God has called us to do because we have a history of *God-facts*

Just like Elisha, every Christ follower is called to serve.

One of the greatest helps for us is the enormous amount of God-facts that surround us. These facts about God enable us to step out and into whatever God calls us to do.

Elisha had grown up around the stories and the facts of what God did through the prophets. Their work was not done in secret. He knew what God was capable of.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who answered God's call and did significant things for Him.

Moses
Abraham
Noah
Joshua
Rahab
David
Daniel and the three Hebrew "children"

The disciples that Jesus called to follow Him are perfect examples of the kind of people Jesus calls to do His work. If Jesus had come to earth and gone around picking people from the best Jewish seminaries and religious institutions He would probably still be here trying to convince them of their task.

The Bible says He chose unlearned and ignorant men. He chose them because they were teachable. They were willing to be like clay in the God's hands.

They knew they didn't have the answer to all of life's tough questions and they yielded their lives to Him. They allowed Him to shape and mold their lives around His will.

That is all that God is asking us for today. The facts are that God is looking for men and women who will live obedient lives who will allow Him to reach others through them.

As you step out rely on the facts that you know about God to lead you in your ministry.

Let me give you an illustration from our text.

Elisha turned and faced him moment of ministry alone and yet I found evidence that he was relying on the facts that were all around him.

I told you last week what Elijah's last act was. He had 100 of the Kings men killed with fire from heaven. Elisha had taken all that in. Look at or listen to the story that unfolds in II Kings 2:23-25, "From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. "Go on up you baldhead!" they said. "Go on up, you baldhead." He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. And he went on to Mt. Carmel and from there to Samaria."

Elisha was acting out what he saw his mentor do. Fortunately he got that under control as he matured. I am extremely fascinated that he went on to Mt. Carmel. That is where Elijah had come from when he called Elisha to follow him.

I think Elisha began his ministry by remembering what God had already done.

Doing what God call us to do will always require a measure of *faith*

Everything that God will call us to do will require faith. For Elisha it was picking up the mantle.

How many of you know that he could have just kept right on walking. He was distressed. He was alone. He was isolated because of the Jordan River being behind him. He could have said, That's it. I've had it."

He could have refused and gone on home and back to the farm.

Instead he chose to trust God. To pick up the mantle/cloak and to follow what God had called him to do.

The reason for this series of messages is simply this. Serving God is more than a once a week encounter with God on a Sunday morning in some church.

Serving God will take more faith than you can imagine.

Serving God and following Him will stretch you and me sometimes beyond what we think we can or should be called to bear.

Listen, I am not going to kid you. Serving in God's army is not easy. It is not always pleasant. Things don't always work out like we would like them to. I grew up singing a song that probably did more damage than good. The chorus of that song says, "Leaning, Leaning. Safe and secure from all alarm."

The more I attempt to follow Christ and walk in His steps I have to question that line. Following Christ and stepping out in faith to attempt something for Him will not keep you safe from all alarm.

Here it again, serving God and being in the center of His will is often the most dangerous place on earth.

You would like to think that if God allows you to be put in a lion's den like Daniel that you would still be able to get out in the morning. Every story that I remember being told about in children's church as a child always involved some great escape or escapade.

Guess what. Not every Christ follower always escaped. Read all of Hebrews 11 and you will find that among those living by faith there were some who were "tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground." The author of Hebrews concluded, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised."

Erwin McManus says, "If you're thrown to the lions, of course you hope you'll be there in the morning to celebrate. But if not, you will be in the presence of God, and you will have provided a small kindness to a few hungry lions.

Billy Graham and his wife returned to China where she had grown up. Her parents were missionaries. When they arrived in China they met a man by the name of James Graham. (no relation) He had been there twenty five years. Came home nearly every evening covered with the spit of those who jeered him as he preached on the street. He was called foreign devil as he preached in the marketplace. Often he was covered with black and blue bruises from the rocks that were hurled at him. James Graham spent twenty-five years in China and counted twenty-five converts. How many of you know that most people would say that wasn't a very good stat. How many of you know that James Graham probably wouldn't get to speak at many church conferences? Because of the

faith and the faithfulness of a man like James Graham there are over 150,000 Christ followers in that same region of China today.

Doing what God wants us to do will open up an entirely new *future* in our lives

Finding a way to allow God to use you will open up doors of opportunity that you could never imagine. The point is if you will ask God He will show you something that you can do that will far surpass your own self-expectations.

The word of God clearly teaches that, *“He will do exceeding abundant above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us”* Eph. 3:20

Another way of saying it is found in the Message: *“And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you’ll be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ’s love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plum the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.*

God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.” (Eph. 3)

By opening yourself to do a ministry that involves serving others you will find that your future looks far different than you could imagine.

I don’t know what God is calling you to do I only know and am convinced that God is calling you to do something that will touch others lives.

You don’t need to look any further than across the street. We live on the mission field.

Years ago Charles Wesley penned similar words of reminder and worship:

A charge to keep I have, A God to Glorify
A never dying soul to save and fit it for the sky.
To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill;
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master’s will.

Isaac Watts took up the call and wrote:

Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own Him cause or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?
While others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?
Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood?

Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God.

Sure I must fight if I would win, increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil; endure the pain, supported by Thy word.

As you face your Jordon River today ask God to show you the way.
Ask Him to show you the direction that He wants you to take.
Ask Him to show you what it is He wants you to do and who it is that He wants you to reach for Him.

God-Facts, Faith, = New Future

I think mission was put very nicely by the 'Sunday Times' journalist Matthew Parris – a man, who is by his own confession, not a Christian.

'The New Testament offers a picture of God, who does not sound at all vague.

He has sent His Son to earth. He has distinct plans for each of us personally and can communicate directly with us.

We are capable of forming a direct relationship, individually with Him, and are commanded to try.

We are told that this can be done only through his son. And we are offered the prospect of eternal life – an afterlife in happy, blissful or glorious circumstances if we live this life in a certain manner.

Friends, if I believed that, or even a tenth of that, how could I care which version of the prayer book is used?

I would drop my job, sell my house, throw away all my possessions, leave my acquaintances and set out into the world burning with desire to know more and, when I had found more, to act upon it and tell others.

Far from being puzzled that the Mormons and Adventists should knock on the door, I am unable to understand how anyone who believed that (which) is written in the Bible could choose to spend their waking hours in any other endeavor.'

And so what is it that God has called you to do? What is it that you are doing for Jesus Christ and in the name of Christ that makes a difference in the lives of others?