

You Want Me to Do What?

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Date: 22 October 2023

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[0 : 0 0] I want to tell you a story about a young man. He was not outgoing. He was rather introverted. And he was the kind of person that only spoke when he thought his words carried weight.

Well, the pastor of the church where he was attending was also serving a little small church about 30 miles away. And like clockwork, every Thursday evening, he would drive out to this little white wooden church building and deliver a sermon to a tiny group of believers.

Well, one day he approached this young man and he said, I need you to preach for me this week at the little church. To his utter surprise, he couldn't believe what was asked of him.

His first response was, you want me to do what? He couldn't imagine standing at the pulpit, let alone delivering a sermon.

But he said yes. And that Thursday evening, as he was standing there in that little church building with the rustic wooden beams above him, the soft glow of the evening light filtering in through the windows and the dust motes floating through the air.

[1 : 2 7] His nervousness was palpable. His voice quivered. His hands were shaking. And yet he delivered the message because it was something that he said he would do.

It was a horrible message. The minutes seemed like hours, but yet he made it all the way through. And to his utter surprise, eventually he was asked to speak again.

Well, this young man, since God's call upon his life, decided to go back to school and to go into the ministry. And would you believe it?

This young man is with us here today. But I'm not quite as young as I used to be. Responding and obeying God's call often requires stepping out of our comfort zone.

If we want to obey God and if we want to do his will and carry out his mission, we are going to have to move forward. And very often it is going to take us moving out of our comfort zone.

[2 : 4 3] This morning we're going to hear about another man who was afraid of answering God's call. And it is in Acts chapter 9 and verses 10 through verse 19.

Let's read that this morning beginning in verse number 10. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias. And to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias.

And he said, Here I am, Lord. So the Lord said to him, Arise and go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus.

For behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him so that he might receive his sight.

Verse 13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

[3 : 45] And here he has the authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name. But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine and to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way and entered the house and laying his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me to you that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once. And he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened.

Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Now, come back to verse number 10 as we look here.

How do we do that? How do we figure out what are we doing? And how do we respond when God calls?

[5 : 04] And I want us to see something this morning that when God calls, it might come in some unexpected places, and it might seem like we are so insignificant, yet God is the one that is calling and we need to respond.

But here's the thing. What we're going to see today is that God can use a nobody to impact somebody that might just impact the world.

So how can we do that? Well, first of all, by recognizing God's call even when it's unexpected. Verse number 10, we see now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and to him the Lord said in a vision, God calls out, Ananias!

Ananias answered, Here I am, Lord. As we go through scriptures, we find many instances where God's call comes in unexpected places and at unexpected times.

It reminds me of Gideon, of the Old Testament. In Gideon's day, there was a group of people, the Midianites, who would come and would take all that they had planted.

[6 : 36] God's people, the nation of Israel, had disobeyed God, and so God had taken this nation, Midian, and He had used them to bring Israel down, and they would plant their seed, and the Midianites would come down with their camels, with all of their people, and they would destroy everything that was planted.

And one day, Gideon is threshing his wheat, not where you would normally thresh wheat, on a little hill, where the wind would drive away the chaff as he would throw up the wheat, but he was threshing wheat in the winepress, which was typically a depressed area, because he was hiding from the Midianites.

He didn't want them to steal his crop. When God unexpectedly appears to Gideon and says, Gideon, you mighty man of valor, and God goes on to tell Gideon what he wants Gideon to do, and Gideon's response is, God, you want me to do what?

He says, I am from the smallest family in my tribe, and I am the least in my own family. How is it that you want me to do this?

So God calls at unexpected times, but God calls Ananias, and what I see in the account of Ananias is Ananias' willingness, even in the humdrum of his life, to be willing and prepare to say, here I am Lord.

[8 : 23] Even in that unexpected moment. Now the thing about Ananias, he was not a profound individual. He was not one of the apostles.

He was a simple disciple there in Damascus, and God comes to him, and God says, Ananias, and he says, here I am Lord.

I want you to ask yourself, am I listening to God's call even in the unexpected moments? When am I expecting and am I willing to answer the call of God even when it's uncomfortable?

I recall listening to one of my college professors when he would talk about one of his Bible college classmates, Jim Elliott, and Jim would talk about sensing God's call to go to a foreign land and to share the gospel to a group of people that had never heard of Jesus before.

Well, Jim heard the call of God. Jim answered the call of God. Jim and four other men went as missionaries to the Waldani tribe in Ecuador to share the gospel.

[9 : 45] This tribe was a very vicious tribe and they were known to be very, very violent. Despite their initial willingness to go, Jim Elliott and the four other men were killed there on the beach in the clearing in the woods.

But despite that, Elizabeth Elliott and the other wives and their family, along with their children, went back to the tribe who killed their husbands, continued sharing the gospel, loving these very men who had killed their husbands and this tribe came to know Jesus as their Savior.

And there are books, there are movies about Jim Elliott. Elizabeth Elliott has written a book about their experience there with the Waldani tribe in Ecuador.

They moved out of their comfort zone and little did they know the repercussions that would take place simply because of their act of obedience, moving out of their comfort zone and allowing God to use them in a mighty, mighty way.

So how can we do that? How can we be willing, how can we be ready to recognize God's call even in the humdrum of our daily lives? Well first of all, every day, how about if we take a moment in our quiet time to ask God to give us our marching orders and say, God, are you speaking to me?

[11 : 30] What are you asking me to do? What do you want me to do today? And then secondly, face our fears with faith.

Look at verses 13 and 14. Ananias is poised, just an ordinary disciple, and he's going about his way, and he hears, so the Lord, back in verse 11, he is told, I want you to get up and I want you to go to Saul of Tarsus and he has already seen from me in a vision of a man who was going, he's already seen you putting hands on him and giving him his vision and so that he can receive his sight.

Well, put yourself in Ananias' shoes. Verse 13, Ananias answers, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.

Well, put yourself in Ananias' sandals. You are going about your business and you are asked by God to go to one of the most infamous persecutors of Christians and you're told to go find him and not only get close to him, but I want you to put your hand on him.

Can you imagine? Can you imagine the fear that is going through the mind of Ananias as he's hearing this? Think about it.

[13 : 24] Would we be willing to do something like that? It would be almost the same as being asked to go willingly into the lion's den and place yourself in harm's way.

But if we have faith in God, we can face our fears, because here's the thing about faith. Faith is not the absence of fear.

fear. It's the courage to move forward in spite of it. Because you see people who have courage out there, and we say, you know, I could never display that kind of courage.

But you ask anyone who has faced battle, you ask anyone who has faced insurmountable odds, but yet moved forward in courage, they would tell you, I was shaking in my boots.

I was so afraid, but it's something I just had to do. So, faith and confidence is not the lack of fear, but it's the willingness and it's the courage to move forward in spite of our fear.

[14 : 43] And God may be calling you to do something that would move you out of your own comfort zone. And I want you to know that every single one of us here has the capacity to show the same kind of courage that Ananias displayed.

Why? Because we serve a big God. It's not about the size of our fear or it's not about the size of our faith.

It's about the size of our God. Because fear can hold us back from doing so many things. There are people today that have confined themselves to their home for decades because they were afraid to cross the threshold because they were afraid of what might happen.

And there are untold followers of Jesus Christ that will not move forward in their faith, will not move forward in the mission because they are afraid of what might happen.

Hope conquers fear because fear is the killer of hope.

[16 : 07] Fear paralyzes action. Fear freezes us in our tracks and it keeps us from moving forward. If you allow fear to dominate you stagnate. If you allow fear to dominate your life you won't be moving forward.

Fear also amplifies our doubt. Fear has a way of magnifying the minuscule.

And here Ananias he said Lord I've heard it through the grape vine that this guy Saul he's been terrorizing all the Christians there in Jerusalem and he's here now in Damascus and not only that he's got the authority to arrest and to bring them back bring us back to Jerusalem put us in prison and possibly put us to death.

So fear was amplifying his doubt. It was amplifying it was magnifying something that may or may not have happened.

[17 : 31] Fear also erodes faith. Faith without hope shrivels. when we lack hope because of fear then we cannot see forward.

Also fear distorts or fear encourages short term thinking. Fear keeps us from seeing a future.

Fear keeps us from seeing the potential possibilities. Fear keeps us from seeing the wonderful possibilities of what might happen.

So fear encourages short term thinking. It's like walking while staring at your feet. It keeps us from seeing a better future or a possible future.

And then lastly fear distorts reality. Fear has a knack for keeping us from doing what God wants us to do.

[18 : 41] It keeps us from seeing what God really wants and it magnifies those things that we're afraid of and many of those things may never actually happen.

So how do we do that? How do we face our fears with faith? We trust God because God is bigger than any fear that you and I might have.

So how do we move forward? How do we step out of our comfort zone? How do we say God I sent you calling I didn't expect you to call me but I feel you calling me to do something.

Well one way that we can move forward is list all of your fears that may be keeping you from moving forward and find passages in scripture that address those fears then memorize them and pray over them and say God I'm afraid God I don't know if I've got what it takes but I know that you've promised in your word that if you call you will equip and then pray over it and God will see that it can be done I want you to ask yourselves what fears are holding you back from answering God's call it might be fear of the unknown it might be fear of failure it might be fear of rejection but whatever it is you may be like that young man in our story you were paralyzed with fright and yes the first time you stepped out of your comfort zone it might not go so well but God says

I want you to do it again the second time may not be quite as scary the third time you may begin to realize that well maybe there's something about this and maybe God's right maybe he sees the end from the beginning and he sees something that I don't see so just as Ananias Ananias was afraid verses 13 and 14 and he is afraid to step out of his comfort zone so the question is why why can we face our fears with faith well we can as we look in verses 15 through 17 we can face the uncomfortable knowing that God has a plan we can face what's out there we can face whatever it is we can face our fears because we know that God has a plan and we can see and have the faith that God is a good

[22 : 05] God just as David King David in the Old Testament as he's writing the Psalms when he faces something and David is afraid we read where David says God you've helped me in the past I know you're going to help me in the future so I know you can help me in the present so the Lord says to him verse 15 go for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles kings and the children of Israel for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake we can embrace the uncomfortable because we know God has a plan now let's be honest we all love our comfort zones do we not there's a certain amount of predictability there's a certain amount of safety in the known

God often calls us to step outside of the familiar and step into the realm of uncertainty why because that's where real growth happens that's where our faith is stretched that's where our faith is grown and that's where God we can see God begin to do some things that are beyond our wildest dreams and so what Ananias did was he faced his fears with faith he embraced the uncomfortable because he knew God had a plan what did God say he said I have set apart Saul and we know from the New Testament God's purpose for Saul's life he would stand before kings and deliver the message of Jesus he was there one of his goals his purpose was for the children of Israel he says

I have so much love and compassion for the children of Israel and I want them to know Jesus Christ so much that I wish it were me that were accursed in order to allow them to know God and ultimately God's purpose for Saul was for you and for me because as we read the majority of the New Testament was written by the Apostle Paul Saul one who was the persecutor of Christians would become the Apostle Paul and he would become the greatest protagonist he would become the greatest mover and shaker to move the gospel forward what if Ananias had said no what if Ananias had dismissed the call of God or what if he had said no because he was too afraid of answering the call of God and moving forward well I believe the movement of the gospel would have looked quite different across the world because God was using someone who was a nobody to impact somebody who would ultimately eventually impact the world so I want you I want us to ask ourselves what are we clinging to today that might prevent us from answering the call of

God in our life what will you do when God calls you to move out of your comfort zone when you're frozen with fear or it seems unwise or it goes against your safe American Christian mindset what are you going to do are you ready are you ready to accept it and say here I am Lord are you poised ready to step out of your comfort zone and to realize what God can do potentially in the lives of others if we will just simply step out in faith are we going to be afraid are we going to allow fear to paralyze us are we going to allow fear to magnify our doubts and anytime we couple fear and doubt together it's destructive so let's move forward let's realize that we serve a God bigger than our fears the purpose of God was bigger than the fears of

Ananias the purpose of God was bigger than Saul's past God wanted to take someone simple just like Ananias the Lord said to him go go anyway and what I find it what I find interesting is God it's okay to be apprehensive it's okay to be afraid don't think for a moment that because you are afraid of something God you sense God is asking you to do that there's something wrong with you it simply means you're human so it's okay to be apprehensive it's okay to be afraid of pushing ahead moving forward going into unknown territory and being afraid of what might happen the thing is isn't that the isn't that the crux of our faith journey

[27 : 59] God says we're to continually be walking we're to continually be moving moving forward taking more ground from Satan and sharing the gospel of Jesus sometimes is going to mean going to places sometimes is going to mean meeting people sometimes is going to mean doing things that goes against every grain everything that we think is right you think about some of the characters in the Old Testament that God told him to do some things and we say oh I could never do that or that didn't even seem right but think about it if God tells you to do something God is the one who wants it and God is always right so let's be willing to step out of our comfort zone and finally let's be prepared to witness the power of simple obedience verses 17 through 19 God didn't chastise

Ananias for his fear God didn't say to Ananias Ananias oh you of little faith he didn't say that God just simply said I've got a plan it's okay I've got a plan Saul has already seen you coming to him laying your hands on him and my plan is bigger than your than your fear so you can move forward and in verse 17 Ananias went his way and entered the house and laying his hands on him he said brother Saul here's what we see here Ananias realizes that if Saul was praying back in verse 11 he said I have already appeared to Saul in a vision and Saul is praying he was praying to

God and so Ananias realizes that Jesus had arrested Saul for his purpose so he comes to him and says you're part of the family brother Saul Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you came has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales and he received his sight at once and he arose and was baptized so when he had received food he was strengthened then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus Ananias moved forward Ananias wasn't willing to stay where he was he was willing to move forward despite his faith see obedience isn't just about seeing results it's about developing a heart that is poised to be ready to hear the voice of God because when we're poised to be ready to hear the voice of God and be ready and willing to obey him and that's when we are drawn closer and closer and closer to our heavenly father

Ananias wasn't afraid when he went forward because his faith in God conquered his fear and he was willing to say brother Saul every act of obedience is one step closer to the heart of God and it's in that dance of faith that we are in tune with his will and it's then we're able to really see our purpose sense fulfillment in our lives and in everything that we do you know sometimes when we think about life-changing trajectory when we think about life-changing moments in scripture you know we think about dramatic things but here is Ananias an ordinary disciple from Damascus he didn't part seas he didn't call down fire from heaven he just simply heard God and obeyed and it was in that simple act of obedience that God used

Ananias to make a difference that would ultimately impact the world because here's what I want you to get even if you forget everything else is that God can use a nobody to impact somebody that might just change the world on April 21st 1855 Edward Kimball led one of his Sunday school boys to faith in Jesus Christ little did he realize that one day Dwight L Moody would become the world's leading evangelist or the ministry of Norman B Harrison in an obscure Bible conference would be the catalyst to bring a young man named Theodore Epp to trust Christ as his Savior and through Theodore Epp God would use to build a back to the

[33 : 52] Bible ministry that would impact people all around the world so let's be praying for daily opportunities to be a channel for blessing and to obey God's call when he prompts us let's be willing to step out of our comfort zone and see what happens let's pray father we thank you for your goodness father we thank you for being bigger than any fear we might face or any fear we might feel bigger than any obstacle we might face father I ask this morning lord as as we are listening to your voice being prepared to hear from you even when it's unexpected lord you may be calling us to go out and start a ministry to an underserved group of people lord it may be you're calling us to to give to give sacrificially maybe you're calling us to to move out of our comfort zone into the unknown even fearing failure to do something lord that may touch and impact someone else and in turn whose life might just change the world for Jesus so father I ask that you would help us encourage us or help us to move beyond our fear out of our comfort zones whether it's teaching a Sunday school class whether it's whether it's preaching a sermon whether it's whatever it is lord I pray that your hand would be upon us and that you would empower us to accomplish the impossible even in the mundane moments we thank you father pray this in Jesus name amen amen so iterators you