

Everyday Pastors: Accepting the Call

For the last several weeks of my life I have wrestled with a lot of personal mostly internal issues. As we make the transition this week from the story of Elijah to Elisha I find myself longing to practice the presence of God daily. We are moving from the story of a man that had lost his passion due to his tiredness, discouragement and a loss of heart.

We pick up the story of a young man full of passion and promise as he answers God's call.

God is looking for a people full of passion.

Authentic Christ followers are passionate people.

Authentic Christ followers are people who burn with a passion to serve God and others.

Too often we take the life changing grace that has come to us very lightly.

Too often we allow ourselves to rest in the comfort of the grace of God that provides us salvation and we never allow it to touch others around us.

This message is the first in a series of messages based on some stories from the life of Elisha that are being written to clearly lay out the expectations and opportunities for the Christ-followers who are a part of this church.

Elisha was the young man that God chose to succeed Elijah. From his life we can learn several basic facts about our responsibilities serving God.

Serving God is much more than an emotional experience.

Serving God is more than great worship and good music.

Serving God is more than reading our bibles and praying everyday.

Serving God is more than keeping ourselves unspotted from the culture around us.

Serving God is always about others.

God is calling this church to another level of walking with Him.

God is calling you to another level in your spiritual journey.

Maybe you are resting.

Maybe you have taken a break for a little while.

Maybe you have put your time in and just don't feel it any more.

God has no reserves or weekend warriors.

God is looking for people who will serve Him by serving others.

There is a grave danger that church people have fallen into in recent years.

It is especially serious in churches like this one.

Because the kind of worship we do answers the emotional needs of some people it becomes very easy to become addicted to the Sunday morning or Saturday experience and walk out of here emotionally stirred but never changed.

God is calling us as a church to begin to minister to other people.

It is one thing to have a nice safe, unchurch-oriented service that we can invite our friends to but we must be about more than a nice safe and wonderful church worship experience.

Tommy Tenney in his book *The God Chasers*, says, “There is something in us that makes us afraid of the commitment that comes with real intimacy with God. For one thing, intimacy with God requires purity. The days of fun and games in the Church are over. What do I mean by “fun and games”? If your definition of fun is low commitment and lots of chills and thrills, then all you’ve wanted to do is date God.

God is tired of us wanting to get our thrills from Him without putting on the ring of commitment! Some are more enamored with the goose bumps than the glory! Their addicted to the anointing, liking the feeling of being blessed, receiving the “gifts” like a religious “gold-digger” happy with chocolates, flowers, and jewelry. The last time I checked He was still looking for a bride, not a girlfriend; one who will stick with him.”

Our goal in the next few weeks will be to help you discover renewed or perhaps new passion about serving God and others.

To do this we are going to look at the story of Elisha’s call and entrance into a passionate relationship with God.

Elisha was called by God in an unusual fashion and this morning we are going to examine this call and understand how it works in our lives as well.

1 Kings 19:10-21

“So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “ Please let me kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and served him.”

There are some steps that we must take to realize the potential that God has place within every one of us.

1. Acknowledge the call God has placed on our lives.

There is no question if you take the Bible seriously that you God places a call on the life of every Christ follower.

Every one of us have been given personalities and gifts that are unique.
Every one of us has something to offer in the area of serving others.

The question I have for you today is simply this, Have you acknowledged God's claim to your life and talents?

What are you doing with what God has given you?
How are you touching others in the community in the name of Jesus?

In the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was continually bumping into fisherman, tax collectors, and political activists and asking them to follow Him.

Listen to the words of Jesus. You have heard them many times.

You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.
Let your light shine.
Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.
Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

This message is not just about ministry opportunities within the church. While we have many opportunities for service and a serious unemployment problem you can answer His call to service outside of ministries sponsored by this church.

The question is not have you have you answered the call to a ministry at this church, the question is have you answered the all anywhere.

What are you doing to touch others?

"Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, Please let me kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you."

2. Abandon ourselves to serve Him.

In the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was continually bumping into fisherman, tax collectors, and political activists and asking them to follow Him.

It's hard to believe in today's context, but these men followed Him. They abandoned their careers, their families, and their futures to follow Jesus.

All because Jesus said, Follow Me. Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." What He is saying is simply, whoever abandons his life will live it to the fullest.

Abandonment to God is dangerous. Serving God to the fullest extent is not safe. It is not lovely and quiet and pious. It is war. It is sweat, hard work, toil and sometimes heartbreak. It can even lead to death.

Like it or not we live in a day of anemic Christianity.

We live in a day when we have made Gods out of our personal desires, wants and wishes. Tommy Tenney again says, "We have become addicted to the relayed word of good preaching and teaching. Too many of us have become, "milk-babies" who want to sit on padded chairs in an air-conditioned and climate controlled building where someone else will pre-digest what God had to say and then regurgitate it back to us in a half-digested form"

Sometimes I believe we can listen to too much Christian radio and TV.

How much preaching and teaching can we continue to soak up before it finally translates into service for God to others?

If you and I are to answer the call of God to passionate Christ-following we are going to have to encounter God in a new and fresh way.

We must leave the old ways and habits of our lives and stretch out before God until we hear his call clearly in our life.

Abandonment to God is costly and requires our undivided loyalties to Him.

What are you afraid of? Let God act. Abandon yourself to Him. You will suffer, but you will suffer with love, peace and consolation. You will fight, but you can carry off the victory, and God Himself, after having fought with you, will crown you with His own hand. You will weep, but your tears will be sweet, and God Himself will come with satisfaction to dry them. You will not be free any longer to give yourself up to your tyrannic passions, but you will sacrifice your liberty freely, and you will enter into a new liberty unknown to the world, in which you will do nothing except for love. Francois Fenelon

Elisha models it well in this scripture.

"So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate."

He was done farming. He was ready to follow God's call. He was passionate about it. In essence he burned the bridges behind him. Symbolically he sacrificed this yoke of oxen as a sign of his willingness to abandon all and follow God.

The United States Women's Softball team won the gold medal in Atlanta's 1996 Olympic games. They lost only one game. In the fifth inning against Australia, Danielle Tyler hit a home run over the center-field fence. When she was greeted by a swarm of well-wishing teammates at home plate she let the excitement distract her focus and she did not STEP ON home plate. When all of the yelling subsided, the Australian team quietly appealed to the umpire who dramatically called Tyler out. Rather than scoring a run, Tyler's blast over the fence netted her team an out. As it ended up, had she stepped on home plate, her team would have won 1-0. Instead, after seven innings of regulation play the game was tied at 0-0. In extra innings, Australia emerged with a 2-1 win and the U.S. team took their only loss of the Olympics. It's not enough to hit a ball into the seats; you have to touch all of the bases as well.

Abandoning one's self to God is a vital part of touching all the bases in our spiritual journey.

3. Allow God to use us in His own way.

Elisha acknowledged the call by abandoning everything he knew that was familiar.

He allowed God to use him by serving an old prophet who was coming down to the end of his life.

What do you need to allow God to do through you today?
What is God calling you to do?

I long for the day when men and women of this body will begin to look at the neighborhood, the community we live in and begin to let God find creative ways to work through us to touch others.

Passion is always risky. The Bible gives example after example of people who fell in love with Jesus and left their jobs, their families, their security. Once people met Jesus, their passion became hazardous to their health. People were estranged from the church and rejected by their parents; they became unemployed suddenly, ended up in jail, lost their lives and became as nothings in the eyes of the world.

Passion is not to be treated lightly. The passionate life is a risky life.

God is calling out to you today to know Him and know Him passionately.

“A young father, a typical type-A personality, followed the same routine every workday. He would arrive home around 5:30 p.m., park the car in the garage, walk out to the driveway with briefcase in hand, pick up the paper, proceed to the front door, enter the house, place the briefcase in the hallway, put the newspaper on the couch in the living room, then walk down the long hallway to the kitchen. Once in the kitchen, he would open the refrigerator, reach for the carton of milk, walk over to the glass, pour the glass full of milk, and return the milk to the refrigerator. Without thinking, he would pick up the glass of cold milk, grab a cookie from the cookie jar on the counter, and walk to the living room where he would sit down, power up the television with the remote, and watch the news while drinking his milk and eating his cookie, sometimes stopping during commercials to browse through the newspaper. His routine had been the same for many years and, unbeknownst to him, his three-year old son had noticed.

One night the father came home from work and began his usual routine. As he stepped into the hallway, setting his briefcase and newspaper down, he looked up to see his son standing down the hall, a smile on his face, obviously anticipating his father’s return. Dad knew something was up, so he stopped and watched his son turn around and head for the kitchen. Pleasantly surprised, the dad crept to the edge of the kitchen to see what his son was up to. The little boy ran to the corner of the kitchen, pulled out the bottom drawer (which he was not supposed to do), stepped on the drawer, climbed onto the counter (which he was not supposed to do), reached into the cupboard, and pulled on a glass, knocking the other glasses over. Thankfully, none of them broke. With glass in hand, the little boy scooted back down onto the drawer, then to the floor, and ran over to the cookie jar. He reached up as high as he could and barely grasping the jar knocked it over and spilled cookies all over the floor. Oblivious to his father, he scooped all the cookies up and put them back on the counter, except for one. He picked up the remaining cookie, ran over to the refrigerator, place the cookie and the empty glass on the floor, opened the refrigerator door, and reached inside and grabbed the plastic half-gallon container of milk. Awfully heavy for a three year old, it promptly fell to the floor, which knocked the top off and spilled a little milk. He then picked up the container of milk and, the container wobbling terribly, began to pour the milk into the glass, spilling milk all over the floor. Any other evening the father would have yelled at his son by this time, pointing out the terrible mess he was making. Instead, he sensed something much more important was happening here; he patiently waited as the little boy picked up the cookie and the glass of milk and came running to him with a huge smile on his face. The dad threw his arms around his son and said, “Thank-you, Son!” Dad realized his son was giving him a wonderful gift.”

This three year old boy had acted purely out of passion for his father and, luckily, his father had recognized it. Normally by the time boys are three, the passion has been learned out of them, and by the time they are big boys, it’s a forgotten luxury of childhood.

As you heard this story, some of you were struggling with neatness. You heard voices of neatness and order screaming in your heads. “Don’t step on a drawer! Get off the counter! Look out, you’re going to break those glasses! Look at eh mess you’ve made on

the floor! You're spilling milk everywhere." If the father had listened to those voices, who knows what damage would have been done to his son. The passionate love of the son revealed the passionate love of the Father, whose only response was gratitude."

Some of only see God as a God who stands in the doorway of our life and continually tells us to, Put the glass down! Stop doing that! Get off the counter!

Can I remind you today that God is looking for passionate responses to His word and His world?

He is looking for people who will hear the call and respond to make a difference in the life of someone else.

As you stumble with your milk and cookies, God is loving you all the way. He will respond and use you in ways you could never imagine.

The response today is not unlike other responses we have invited you to participate in.

We often invite you to come forward and kneel and pray and certainly that is always an option.

The Roman emperor Charlemagne has an interesting story surrounding his burial. This famous king asked to be entombed sitting upright in his throne. He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand. He requested that the royal cape be draped around his shoulders and an open book be placed in his lap.

That was A.D. 814. Nearly two hundred years later, Emperor Othello determined to see if the burial request had been carried out. He allegedly sent a team of men to open the tomb and make a report. They found the body just as Charlemagne had requested. Only now, nearly two centuries later, the scene was gruesome. The crown was tilted, the mantle moth-eaten, the body disfigured. But open on the skeletal thighs was the book Charlemagne had requested – the Bible. One bony finger pointed to Matthew 16:26: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"

Around the front of the altar area today are tables with matches. If you are hearing God's call, the one that comes to every believer and you would like symbolically to pick up a match today as a reminder for you to let the fire of God burn in you. I would invite you to come to the front on your way out the door today and take one of these matches. Some of you might want to linger and talk with God. That's okay. Just move over to the ends of the platform and spend as much time as you would like.