



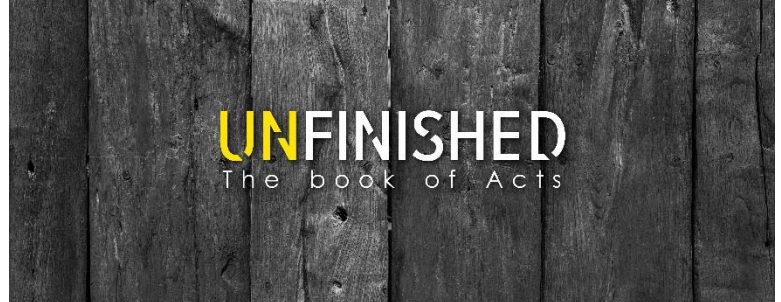
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Unfinished

Part 17: Are You a Mothball Christian or a Missional Christian?

Acts 9:18–31 | Tim Badal | January 14, 2018



Last week we were in Acts 9, where we saw a dramatic and transforming change that took place in the life of a man named Saul from Tarsus. He was a predator who sought to destroy the church and stop the gospel message from spreading. But on his journey to harass and persecute the believers in Damascus, he was stopped by a blinding light. Jesus Christ Himself appeared to Saul, asking him, “Why are you persecuting and fighting against Me? Why are you seeking to destroy the very thing that is about to give you life?”

Saul fell to his knees, realizing he was a sinner in need of the saving power of Jesus Christ. We learned that Jesus saved him, then after three days, He healed him from the blindness that had come upon him through the ministry of a disciple named Ananias. Saul regains his strength and is welcomed into the Christian community. So now we ask—what happens next? Here is a man who has been dramatically changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let’s read our passage in Acts 9:18–31:

Then he rose and was baptized;¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?”²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

²³When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Hopefully verse 31 would be our prayer, that we would experience a peace that allows us to be built up, walk in the Lord and multiply.

While the text still calls him Saul, I’m going to refer to him as Paul from this point on, as he has now become an apostle of Jesus Christ who will go on to impact the lives of countless people—including us today. He ministered in particular to the Gentile nations, of which we are one.

After his dramatic change, we might wonder what was next for Paul? In our Christian culture we tend to see our conversion, and the conversions of others, as the finish line rather than the starting block. Many of us think if we can just get someone saved so their eternal salvation is assured, that is the end of the ballgame. But what we’ll see in Paul’s life is that the road to Damascus was only the beginning for him. Yes, he was converted on that road and baptized in Damascus by Ananias. He was encouraged in the faith by a small group of believers, but there was much more to be done through his life.

It's sad when people who say they follow Christ only have their initial conversion experience as their testimony. They haven't grown out of the nursery of newborn Christianity into adult ministry. As a result, even in a healthy church like Village Bible Church, there are people here who are sitting on the sidelines, content to allow others to do all the ministry. I'm going to call that kind of Christianity "Mothball Christianity."

I recently learned that we have a fleet of ships in our Navy that is called the "Mothball Fleet." They're in different harbors all around the United States. There are hundreds of ships—aircraft carriers, battleships, destroyers, frigates, you name it—and they're just sitting there. They're being maintained and kept battle-ready, but when no battle happens, they just stay in those harbors. These ships may have been used in former times of battle, but have been built in preparation for some future need. Like these ships, there are many Christians who find themselves, not in the battle, but sitting and collecting barnacles. They're being maintained and ministered to in the church, but they're not living out what they have been called to do. We have a Mothball Navy, but sadly, we also have a mothball Christianity. We have a lot of people who are sitting idly by, allowing the commands and calling of Christ to pass them by. They think they arrived when they asked Jesus into their heart, but as we'll see in Paul's life, there was a whole lot ahead of him.

Mothball Christians are those who are content to relegate themselves to the sidelines. Is this you today? Have you decided you've arrived, that you've done all you need to do? Maybe you're thinking that going into the game might bring injury, more trauma than you're willing to endure. You're okay with sitting on the sidelines. The mothball Christian lives every day in a spiritual maintenance mode. They get just enough to maintain their Christianity, but they never step out in faith. They never ask God, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"

We don't want Village Bible Church to be filled with mothball Christians. We want Christians who are alive and active. We want them serving and honoring Christ in the world through all they say and do. But how do we get there? Today we will look at the model Paul gives us. But you might protest, "Tim, how in the world can you compare us to the Apostle Paul? He was a persecutor of the faith before he came to know Christ. He experienced a direct revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus. He experienced a physical malady given by God, then was healed. We're not even in the same stratosphere. Why should we use him as an example of how we today in the Fox Valley area, in 2018, are supposed to live our lives for Christ?"

Paul tells us this is what we should do. In 1 Timothy 1:16 he says, "My conversion and my calling are a pattern for all of you." He indicates that our conversion is not something to be put away as an extraordinary event. Rather, it's supposed to provide a pattern for the way God works in each of us. We might wonder how his life is a pattern for us. We weren't persecutors. We didn't meet Jesus the way he did on the road to Damascus. We've never been blinded and healed.

This is what Paul means: We're sinners, just as he was, and we've been saved by the same amazing and abundant grace of Jesus Christ. God has saved us, He is now loving us and ministering to us. The same Holy Spirit Who came into Paul lives in every Christ follower today. Just as God called Paul to a ministry, God has called us to a ministry. Just as God told Paul, "What I begin in you I will bring to completion," so His promise to us is faithful and sure, that what He has started in us He will complete. It's a pattern of how Christ does things. God doesn't save us just for us to sit on the sidelines. If that was all there was to following Him, He probably would have raptured us away as soon as we were converted. But He leaves us here for a purpose: to be missional. We are to be on mission for Christ. There is no greater missional Christian than the Apostle Paul himself. He gave up his comforts and devoted his entire life and energy for the cause of Jesus Christ in his world. That's what God calls us to as well. So how do we get there? There are three things we need to know if we want to be missional Christians. We can't miss this.

God has a plan for your life, so live life on purpose.

Let's return for a moment to last week's text, Acts 9:15. God is saying to Ananias: *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.'"*

The first thing we're to understand through God's instruction to Ananias is that He has use for people. It's a little ironic that God tells Ananias that Paul is going to be His instrument, because actually Ananias himself is also being used as an instrument of God. He is to speak to Paul, encourage him, and eventually even heal and baptize him. But Paul will also become God's instrument. We have a God Who uses people for His grace and glory. Paul is told that he is *"a chosen instrument."* He won't be God's only instrument—he is simply an instrument, one of many. When we come to Christ, God has something for us as well. Later in his ministry, Paul wrote, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of*

works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). It's not from us—Christ has done it all. It's by His grace that we are part of His family. But that's not the finish line. Coming to Christ is not the end of the story.

Paul continues in verse ten, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* There is a list of things God has for you and me to complete. There is a specific list designated for each of us based on our experiences, our personalities, our abilities and our life situations. God has a purpose for each of us. Our job is to figure out that purpose and then to live according to it as God's chosen instrument.

When I realized that truth, it changed my life. I was about 15 years old, and it was about a year after my older brother had been killed in a car accident. My brother was one of the most popular, handsome and charismatic guys you could know. He was a senior in high school and the homecoming king. He had everything going for him. As a younger brother, I lived perpetually in that shadow.

Remember, even if you're popular, you're still mortal. But when you die, you become immortal. My brother became immortal in my local high school. I fell into the idea that if I was going to be loved, if I was going to have any impact in this world, I needed to become like him. It was a warped idea back then, and it still is today. But I felt I needed to act, talk and dress like him, because no one was going to accept me for who I was, so I had to become something else.

Then the youth pastor from this church took me out one day. He asked me, "Why are you living a lie? Why are you living someone else's life? Don't you know God could have created two Chris Badals, but He didn't. He created one Chris—with all the bumps and warts and bruises and idiosyncrasies he had. As great as he was, he was a flawed creature. And He also created you. He made you to be you—not to be someone else. You aren't called to run someone else's race."

That man looked me straight in the eye and said, "God's got a plan for you." With tears in my eyes I told him, "I can't see it. I don't believe it." That man, who knew Chris well, prophetically said to me, "I don't know what your brother could have done or would have done. But he's gone. He lived in his generation, and God has taken him home. What are you going to do in your generation with the gifts and abilities God has given you?"

The reason this youth pastor spent this time with me was because I had just been arrested for a crime. Why would someone spend time with a 15-year-old kid who was falling apart? But he had enough grace from God to tell me, "You criminal—you thug, Tim Badal—God's got a plan for you." Who would have thought—especially those who knew me back then—that God would do what He's done in my life? This isn't just true for the Apostle Paul. It isn't just true for your pastor. God has a plan for you. He wants you to live with that plan and purpose.

God's plan shows us that God is continually active in our lives.

We need to remember some things about what God will do. First, He will be continually active as that plan unfolds. He will walk alongside us in this process. He will make sure we have everything we need. It wasn't like Paul was told, "You're going to be My chosen instrument...so good luck! I hope you figure it out. I hope you can find enough time and energy and giftings to make it happen." God didn't kick him out of the nest and leave him to fly on his own. Remember the message God gave to Ananias? *"He is a chosen instrument of mine."* There's possession. We are His instruments and He wants to use us.

This last year on Black Friday, I splurged and bought myself a brand-new snow blower. I became the envy of everyone in Hinckley. But as soon as I bought it, I wondered what was going to happen this winter. Was it going to snow? Why would that bother me? It was because I had an instrument that I didn't want to have sit idle. I wanted to use it. So as soon as we had a half inch of snow, I was outside with my massive snow blower, to the amusement of my neighbors. After all, the purpose of that snow blower is not to sit in my garage. It is to throw thousands of tons of snow a hundred feet from where I'm standing. I love it. I want to see it. I've been praying we would have five inches of snow today so I could rev that sucker up and start moving some snow.

Some of you are content to sit in God's garage. Some of you are content with God having purchased you with His own blood so you could sit and never be used by Him. God loves using His instruments. He gets excited.

The boys wanted to use the snow blower. I said, "No, this is my toy. You stay away, okay?" God wants to use you, because it's awesome when He sees you living out what you were created to do. When I get to use that snow blower, I realize it was a good investment. I paid a price and now it is returning a yield for me. God has saved us, not so we can sit in His garage or on His workbench as an instrument that's just there. Rather, He wants to show the world that this was a wise investment. "I've paid for this person's sin. I've cared for them and ministered to them. Now watch how I will use this instrument for My glory, so others may be impacted." God is continually active in our lives. He never leaves us. He lives with us, guides and directs us.

Every time I feel unqualified for something God has called me to, I remember this truth: “God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called.” He’ll meet you where you are and He’ll give you what you need to accomplish what you’ve been called to do. He’ll walk alongside you in that process.

God’s plan shows us that we have been given a crucial action.

This plan we’ve been given is a crucial activity. We have a job to do. God turned a persecutor into a worshiper. He didn’t just have Paul change sides. Rather, there was a real plan for Paul’s life. We see in Acts 9:15 that Paul was to carry the name of Christ: *“He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”* Some translations may use the word “bear” instead of “carry.” This is because some Greek words have multiple sides to their definitions. The first meaning of the word “carry” was to “bear” in the sense of identifying one’s self with a family. If I were to say, “Hi, my name is Tim,” that doesn’t tell you anything. But when I say my name is Tim Badal, I bear the name of a clan of people called the Badals. If you’ve lived around here for a while, you know there are a whole group of Badals out in Hinckley. And you might wonder if this man who bears the name of Badal is the son of Bill and Michele Badal.

I was at a basketball game this past Friday and as I walked through the hallway someone heard me talking. He came up to me and asked, “Your dad wouldn’t be Bill Badal, would he?” I said, “Yeah—how did you know that?” He said, “I heard it in your voice.” You see, I am a “duplication” of the man whose name I carry. I look like Bill. I talk like Bill. Sadly, I’m starting to smell like Bill. It is what it is, because I bear his name.

When Jesus tells Ananias that Paul will bear His name, that means Paul will identify with Him. People will see that Paul belongs to Christ. He will begin to look and sound and act like Jesus did. He will love and lead and minister as Jesus did. When people see Paul, they will see Christ, because he bears His name and is living as He commanded him to.

The second meaning of the word “bear” is to carry in the sense of bringing something. Paul was going to be a conduit of Christ, taking His gospel message from point A to point B. The Greeks would say that a herald would carry the message of the king from the king’s court to the people in the villages throughout the empire.

It’s important to realize that the idea of carrying implies that we have two jobs. First, we are to be living our lives in such a way that when people see us walking through the school hallway or the workplace or in our neighborhood, they see us and are reminded of Christ. “Aren’t you a follower of Jesus? Don’t you bear His name?” Once we have shown the world that we are bearers of the name of Jesus, we are then to carry the gospel message. In Galatians 1, a parallel passage to Acts 9, we’re told that the message Paul was given to carry was the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have two jobs: to live like Christ and to preach Him to the world around us.

Right away, some of us who are mothball Christians might be thinking, “We’ll leave that to the pastors. We’ll leave that to the missionaries. We’ll leave that to those who are gifted in evangelism.” But pastors, evangelists, teachers and missionaries weren’t the only ones given the Great Commission. We all were. So we need to live like Christ. We need to love like Christ and then we need to tell people the message of Christ. We need to be the conduit that takes the gospel message from the life we’ve experienced to the world that needs to hear it.

Peter put it this way: *“You are a chosen race...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). We’re to tell people, “Hey, I used to be in the darkness just like you are, but now God has shown me the light. My life is now different.” Paul used to bear the name “Pharisee,” but now he bears the name of worshiper and apostle of Jesus Christ.

This is the crucial activity to which we also are called.

God’s plan shows us that we have been placed before a certain audience.

God also intends for us to reach a specific audience. Let’s look again at Acts 9:15. Where was Paul called to serve? There are three places listed here: *“He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”* Many scholars think the reason Luke lists them in this order is that it represents Paul’s priorities. With that in mind, Paul’s first priority is to go to the Gentiles, but he will also have opportunities to preach to kings and rulers and those in authority. Then third, Paul will also have a ministry to his own kinsmen, the children of Israel. Paul is being sent to live like Christ, love like Christ and preach like Christ, first to the Gentiles, then to kings, and third to the children of Israel.

That brings us to the question of what audience God has placed you before to model and preach Christianity. Who are your Gentiles, kings and Israel? Most of the people we reach are within about 50 miles of where we live. That's where we work, where we find our entertainment and where our friends live.

But within that 50-mile radius there are about five million people. So within that group, who are we personally called to? Well, if you're married and have a family, that's your first audience. What good would it be for me to have more people to preach to in my church, and to have more campuses as part of our church, if the Badal family is falling apart? That's my starting point. But some of you may have abdicated the role of ministering to your family. That's God's first priority for you.

Second, consider where you live. Suppose I preached everywhere else, but my own community remains lost. I've been honest with you. I struggle every week with the fact that I live in Hinckley, but I spend most of my time here in our church community. In other words, I leave town every day, yet God has given me a burden to preach to my own neighborhood and friends. By His grace, we've seen lots of friends and neighbors in Hinckley come to find Jesus and join us here.

So to find out where God has placed you, first consider where you live and where you work. Ask God why He placed you where you are. Acts 17:26 says God has determined the boundaries of your dwelling place. It's not because you and your spouse liked the house. He put me where I am because He wanted a light somewhere in the vicinity of 410 Prairie View Lane in Hinckley, Illinois.

Why did God give you the job you're in? Was it because you could put together widgets or be a great salesman, or whatever it is you do? Maybe that was part of the reason. But even more, that's the workplace or factory or school or office where God wanted a light—because it was pitch black before you got there. He wanted someone to go there every day—and get paid at the same time—so you could be the conduit for the gospel of Christ in that world.

Finally, if we live as missional Christians on purpose, then we can ask things like, "Why did God let me get in this checkout line? Why am I getting to know this mechanic? Why am I now in conversation with this stranger?" Every moment of our lives, we should be asking, "God, what do You want me to say here? What is Your purpose?" Missional Christians recognize that God has a plan, we find our priorities, then we position ourselves to live them out. Are you living your life on purpose today?

God is patient with your growth—so persevere in the process.

You might be thinking, "Paul was a persecutor of Christians and then lickety-split, now he's proclaiming the gospel." That's half true. He did start preaching right away. Verses 19 and beyond indicate that his strength increased and he started ministering. That's what young believers often do. In their excitement about what they've experienced and what they've learned, they want to share it with everyone they meet. Then as we go on through the years as believers, this enthusiasm usually wanes.

As we read this text, it seems that Paul's ministry took off in a matter of a few days. But that's not quite what happened. Verse 23 says, "*When many days had passed...*" We have no idea how long that was, but it was more than a few days. It might even have been weeks or months. Verse 19 tells us, "*For some days he was with the disciples...*" and the "many days" was after that. Luke doesn't give us a daily commentary on Paul's activities.

However, we're given other details in Paul's own account in Galatians 1, which was one of his earliest letters to the churches. Starting in verse 11 we read:

¹¹For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

After he came to know Christ, Paul went to Arabia before returning to Damascus. Well, Paul, how long were you there? Look at verse 18: "*Then after three years I went to Jerusalem.*" Where does this fit into the story in Acts 9? We know Paul preached for a season in Damascus, then it says in verse 23, "*And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples*"—the apostles. We now know how long it was before he went to Jerusalem—three years.

God's patience may involve lots of time.

It's important that we realize that God's plan for us includes taking the time for us to grow in the grace and knowledge of His Son Jesus Christ. Three years—that's 1,095 days, or 26,280 hours. That's a lot of time. God didn't mature Paul instantly. It was a process. We might be eager to know where our ministry opportunities are, but God reminds us that He is a patient God.

You might remember from our earlier studies that God views time differently than we do. He is not in a hurry. He waited decades before He gave Abraham a son. God waited 13 years for Joseph to go through lots of trials before He raised him up to the position of prime minister of Egypt. God waited 40 years before He spoke to Moses in a burning bush. And when you chronicle the life of Paul, God actually took 14 years to prepare Paul before his ministry finally took off.

I want you to see something very important between Acts 9:25 and 9:26. Do you see the white space in your Bible? That is a theological moment; a moment when God was shaping a man who needed to become more like Christ. Some of us may be in that white space between the verses. Our human response can be, "How long, Lord? When is this going to end? I've been patiently waiting for three minutes."

About a month ago I asked some of my boys to help rake leaves. Luke was out there, Johnny-on-the-spot—and then five minutes later he was gone. I found him inside and said, "Hey, Luke, the job's not done." He said, "When you asked for help, I was thinking minutes, not hours." Some of us are on the minute clock instead of the hour-day-week-month-year clock God may be on. We decide God has left us or forgotten us.

The best people in God's ministry are those who wait the longest. When it takes a long time, that could mean God is up to something bigger than we had imagined. What is He doing during this time of waiting? In Paul's case, we know he went to "Arabia"—probably the deserts of Jordan which were next to Syria where Damascus was located. We're not told what he did while he was there. There are some things we know about his experience there. Paul never wrote a letter from there; at least not that we have. He didn't plant a church there. There is no mention of any widespread ministry in Arabia. We don't hear of anyone he met there. It seems for the most part that Paul was there alone. In his biography of Paul, Chuck Swindoll calls it the "solitude in quietness and obscurity chapter of Paul's life." But as Christians, we are really never by ourselves

God's patience may involve lots of training.

We learn in Galatians 1 that while in waiting, things were revealed to Paul by God. Maybe you're waiting right now, and if so, here are some things to think about. During these years, Paul was being trained. He had already been trained in Judaism, but he didn't know much about what it meant to be a Christian, a true follower of Christ. So by God's grace and revelation and power, Paul was given a seminary course on what it means, not only to be a Christian, but to be a church planter, a missionary and a preacher.

Maybe you're waiting now and you're wondering why. But the answer could be that God is in the process of training you. It could include formal education, but it may just mean you need to go through some experiences that will strengthen and prepare you for what God calls you to do. Some of you might be struggling with being single, but don't look at this time as a season for languishing. If you really believe God has called you to marriage, then this is the time when you're preparing yourself to be the best husband or wife and possibly the best parent you can be. Don't expect to learn everything when you actually get there, but there is value in letting God teach, even as you wait. For those who want higher levels of ministry, you may need a similar season of listening and experiencing, so when God brings the opportunity you will be prepared for it.

God's patience may involve lots of therapy.

I also believe that during his time in Arabia, God was giving Paul some "therapy." I don't mean the psychobabble sort of therapy, but I do think God was working on Paul's heart. Remember, Paul was a persecutor. Perhaps God knew that one day Paul would be preaching to people and someone would interrupt, "Yeah, but you killed my brother." "You incarcerated my dad." "You devastated my community when I was a young boy." "We had come to love Jesus, then you came and devastated our homes and families." Can you imagine the guilt Paul would have felt in those moments?

Some of us as may well have come out of a life apart from Christ during which we did things we're now ashamed of. We can't get over our guilt. But then God puts us in the desert season and over time helps us deal with these things. It's not that He erases them, but He allows them to scar over so even though we remember them, we are no longer defined by them. Don't think that during your time of waiting that God has forgotten you. Some of His best work is done in the waiting rooms of your life. Be patient

and persevere. I wonder how many times Paul might have said, “I think I’m ready now, Lord. Let’s go.” But God said, “A little more time. Just a little more time.”

God has a path for you—so press on toward the goal.

Finally, we see that God not only has a plan, and not only does He patiently prepare us, but He also has a path in mind for each of us. So we must press on toward the goal. In Acts 9 we read that Paul eventually comes to Jerusalem. He’s now been through the desert experience and he’s probably thinking things are going to be great. He’s going to meet Peter, John and all the other disciples.

When you love Jesus, you want to be with other people who love Him. Paul knows he now has so much in common with the believers in Jerusalem. But then we read in verse 26, as he attempts to join them, *“They were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.”* The club is closed. They don’t want him around, because they weren’t sure he had really changed.

This path can be doubted and rejected by others.

When you take a step for the Lord, some will doubt and push you away. They’ll question your authentic conversion and calling.

One of the hardest things for me as I became the pastor of this church was that I had dear friends in this church who were skeptical. A lot of people probably agreed. I was 26 years old. You think I’m crazy now—think about how immature I was back then. When it was announced that I was to become the teaching pastor, one of my friends threw up his hands and said, “This is craziness,” then walked out of the church. It broke my heart. I loved that man. His wife and my wife called themselves friends. But sometimes our callings are going to be doubted and pushed away by others.

If everybody is telling you in godly wisdom that you’re not to be in a certain role, maybe you need to reconsider. But if most people are affirming it, then even if a few key people disagree, they may be the ones missing it. I’m going to say in all humility, in light of the last 15 years, my friend was probably wrong. But it’s going to happen and sometimes you’re going to say, “God called me to this,” and your wife is going to think you’re crazy. Or your parents might have doubts.

I remember that when I told my parents I thought I was called to the ministry, my father cried. He told me, “That’s going to be a hard life. Cater. That’s easy! You can sleep at night when you’re a caterer. When you’re a pastor, you’ve got to deal with people’s souls. Are you sure?”

God uses the doubts of others to strengthen us and help us decide if we’re really called to something.

This path can be disappointing without partners.

The apostles definitely doubted Paul’s calling at first. But when God calls us, He will inevitably have someone who will come to affirm it. Last week we learned that it was Ananias who believed God’s call on Paul. This week it is Barnabas. The man whose name means “son of encouragement” puts his arm around Paul and brings him to the apostles. He says, “I can vouch for this guy. He’s the real deal.”

There were people in my life as well, as my calling was beginning to take shape, who put their arm around me and attested to God’s working in my life. So when you’re called, God will bring people to affirm and encourage you.

This path will demand total participation.

Paul would later say, “I’m being poured out as a drink offering. I’m being spent.” Being a missional Christian is not something we do just on Sundays. It’s not something we do when we’re around other Christians. It involves total participation. As we’ll see, Paul is going to suffer greatly—and maybe God has also called you to a life of suffering. Or He might call you to a life of ease. He gets to determine that according to His sovereign will. But we have to be all in, carrying our cross and following Him. This missional thing isn’t a “one and done.” It is an on-going participation that demands all of us.

This path has a destination that is promised.

The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:13–14, *“Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* He goes on to say, *“Let those of us who are mature think this way...”* All of us who are mature should embrace this point of view.

Have you embraced the fact that God has a calling on your life? Do you believe God has a plan, that He is patiently making you something different than you are? Then walk that path, as difficult as it may be. God says that when you walk that path, He will be faithful to see it brought to completion.

Are you sitting in a harbor somewhere, on the sidelines somewhere, collecting barnacles? Or are you on fire for the gospel of Jesus Christ—that gospel that has saved you and has made you into a new creature—so you can now go and win others, changing the world wherever God has placed you? I pray you will do that, for your good and for God’s glory.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).