



Pastor Caleb Duvick Called

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Series: Expectant
1 Kings 19:19-21

BIG IDEA – GOD IS CALLING ALL OF US; THE ONLY QUESTION IS TO WHAT AND WHERE

Good morning, church. We're glad to have you here. Everyone who is here in Winston or joining us in our Lexington Campus, welcome. My name is Caleb Duvick. I'm one of the pastors here at Two Cities Church. I want to start off our time by asking you all a question: Have you ever had anybody in your life who has called you into something?

Maybe, for you, that was a coach who called you into a leadership role. Maybe, for some of you, that was a boss who put you into a new position that you never knew you had in you, or maybe it was a parent who called you into the vocation you're in today. Well, that person, for me, was a guy whose name is Ken Rudolph. I have a picture of Ken and me up here behind me.

I actually had the privilege of getting together for lunch with him a couple of months ago. I had not seen him for almost two decades, but this guy played a huge role in my life the summer before my senior year. Here's the guy *he* used to know two decades ago. That is, in fact, me long before I ever knew Krispy Kreme existed. This is also proof that Sandwich, Illinois, is, in fact, a real place and that puka shell necklaces were and are still awesome, so let's bring them back.

So, that's who Ken got to know. I met him at a summer camp up in northern Michigan, a Christian camp called *Lake Ann*. Ken was, and still is, the speaker at that camp. So, going into that camp, I thought I was going to wrap up my senior year of high school, to college and become a teacher and coach, and just serve faithfully in whatever local church God put me in, but God and Ken had other ideas for my life.

Halfway through the week at the camp there, Ken finished preaching, and then he challenged all of the students who were there to consider going into full-time vocational ministry. For whatever reason, that night, the Lord grabbed my heart, and over the next couple of days, I sat and considered what it would look like for me to do that. I had conversations with people who knew me. I had conversations with Ken. By the end of that week, I had fully surrendered my life to full-time vocational ministry.

The passage we're going to be looking at today is looking at one of the most famous instances of calling in the Old Testament. It's the calling of the prophet Elisha. So, if you have your Bibles, you can turn or type with me to 1 Kings, chapter 19. We've been looking at big swaths of Scripture over the last couple of weeks, but we're going to be zooming in on three sentences, basically, three verses, verses 19-21.

We're going to unpack these verses, and then we're going to be looking at the implications of this story for our lives. The big idea I want us all to be able to walk away with today is that *God is calling all of us; the only question is to what and where.*

Let's start by looking at verse 19. This is right where we left off last week. If you remember, God was telling Elijah that he was going to raise up another prophet after him. So, let's start in verse 19. It says, ***"So [Elijah] departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth."***

So, what do we know about Elisha, this guy who's being called up, who's being raised up as the next great prophet of Israel? Well, we don't know much. All we have is verse 19 here. We see he was a farmer. When Elijah shows up, Elisha is out in the fields. He's plowing with the equipment of the day.

Some of you might remember I grew up on a farm, so I know a little bit about plowing. For me, it was a little bit easier. All I had to do was turn a wheel, and I was stuck staring at the green hood of a John Deere, but for Elisha it was a whole lot harder. This guy was grinding. All he had to look at were ox rears, so we have it a whole lot better today.

One of the things we see about God's calling is that when God calls people, it often happens in the ordinary. It happens in Elisha when he's just out in the fields, or we see it with shepherds watching sheep. We see it with disciples who are fishing. We see it with Mary, who's just sitting alone in her home. God often calls us in the ordinary times.

What else do we see about Elisha? Well, we also see that he's wealthy and successful. It says he has 24 oxen. That may not mean much to you, but here's a better way to think about it. Oxen are like cars. Back then, the middle-class family would have only

had maybe one ox, so this guy is loaded. It also says he was behind the twelfth pair. What does that mean? Well, he probably has servants who are with the other 11 pairs, plowing in a field.

So, Elisha has land. He has servants. He has a lot of resources. But other than that, what do we know? Not much else beyond that. So, what qualifies Elisha for this type of huge role the Lord is going to call him into? Honestly, there's not much. There's nothing particularly special about Elisha that God would call him. That shows us that God often calls people who are overlooked, unlikely, or underqualified.

We see that with guys like Gideon. He's a fearful nobody that God raises up. We see that with David, who's the forgotten shepherd out in the pasture. We also see that Elisha is not waiting around for this call. He's not sitting there twiddling his thumbs, waiting for Elijah to show up. He's just getting after work. So, we see that God often calls people when it's unexpected.

So, in the midst of that, Elijah shows up. Look with me at the end of verse 19. ***"Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him."*** If you're anything like me, you're thinking, "That's a bit strange." The only person who likes me putting my clothes on them is my wife when she feels cold. Any other time I've done that, people have thought I was a creep, so I don't recommend that.

What's the deal with the cloak? What's the symbolism there? What's the purpose? Well, the cloak was often the symbol of the prophet back in the day. So, when Elijah does this, he's putting it on Elisha, and he's basically saying, "I want you to follow me. I want you to learn from me. I want you to apprentice with me."

Then, let's look at Elisha's response, because this is the heart of what we want to get into today. It says in verse 20, ***"And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, 'Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.' And he said to him, 'Go back again, for what have I done to you?'"*** Essentially saying, "Who's stopping you? Go do what you need to do."

Verse 21 says, ***"And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him."*** When Elisha responds to God's calling, he responds in two different ways.

The first way we see him responding is with a celebration. In spite of the challenge of what it's going to mean for him to be the apprentice of the most hated guy in all of Israel, we see him responding with complete excitement. How do we know that? Because he throws this huge feast. He kills all of his cows, and he's going to feed them to everybody.

Do you guys know how much meat you can get from a single cow? It's a ton. I had to look this up. From one cow, you can get 120 pounds of steak, 100 pounds of roast and brisket, 200 pounds of ground beef, and 70 pounds of beef stew and ribs. Praise the Lord. Amen?

Now imagine that times 24. Everybody is grabbing their Traeger, their Green Eggs, their Blackstones, and they're on the carnivore diet for months. That's the kind of party Elisha is throwing, because he is so excited about what the Lord has called him into.

We see it doesn't just come with a celebration; this calling also comes with a sacrifice, because when God comes calling, it always comes with a cost. What does that cost look like for Elisha? Look with me in verse 20. ***"And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, 'Let me kiss my father and my mother [goodbye]..."***

You see, part of the cost to following God's call for your life means you may have to make some gospel goodbyes. That's what Elisha had to do with his mother and father. Back in the day, family ties were everything. In following Elijah, he's saying goodbye to his home, his family, and his community.

What else is he saying goodbye to? He goes on in verse 20 and says, ***"Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."*** Here's what happens when he follows Elijah. It means Elisha is sacrificing wealth and economic security. Elisha is essentially walking away from the equivalent of a thriving family business or a generational fortune. He's saying goodbye to those things.

He's sacrificing comfort and stability, because life on the farm was something that was predictable. It was respected. It was stable. But he's going to go into prophetic ministry, again, with the greatest outlaw in Israel at the time. So, what is he getting himself into? By following Elijah, he's getting into danger, rejection, uncertainty, and isolation. It's basically the antithesis of everything he has experienced up to this point.

We also see that he's sacrificing autonomy and authority, because back on the farm he was the CEO. He was the one who was running everything. By stepping into this role, he's becoming the apprentice for someone. He's going from calling the shots to the one who's making copies and making coffee. So, this is a huge sacrifice from Elisha.

But listen. He is not just simply walking away from it. He goes even further than that. What does it say he does? Verse 21 says, ***"And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen..."*** It's saying he literally kills the cows and burns the plows.

Elisha isn't just stepping away from his former life. He's so committed to following through with this that he is destroying all options of returning. He's saying, "I have no plan B. This is it. I am all in. There's no turning back." What we see from him is that from this point on, he fully steps into the ministry and mission the Lord has placed on his life.

So, here's the big question: When we look at the call of Elisha and his response, what does that mean for us? I believe this picture of Elisha is a picture of you and me, because just like Elisha, God is calling every single one of us, and like I said, the only question is to what and where. So, I want to give you what the Bible says is the *what*. What is God calling you and me and everyone into?

The first call the Lord is giving us is the call to *follow*. Just like Elisha was called to follow Elijah, God is calling us to follow him. That's what it means to be a Christian. To be a Christian means we are followers of Jesus, and I want to tell you, that is the greatest calling we could ever get. The call to follow Jesus Christ is the greatest calling anyone could ever extend to you, because this is the gospel.

Just like Elisha, Jesus comes to us right where we are. We didn't have to be looking for it. We don't have to be qualified for it. For some reason, Jesus chooses us, and he looks at us and says, "Follow me." Here's what that means for us. He gives us so much more than Elisha ever got when he was called.

When we're followers of Jesus, here's what it means. It means our salvation. It means freedom from sin. It means purpose and hope and eternal security. Here's what's extended to you: life with God because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. It's a free gift of grace. You couldn't earn it, and you can't deserve it, but when Jesus looks at you, he looks at you with love and is inviting you to follow him. There's nothing greater that could ever be extended to us.

So, when we say yes to that calling, just like Elisha, it comes with celebration. There's no greater thing we could ever experience. Why would we not celebrate that? That's what we're going to do right here today. At the end of our service, we are going to celebrate with people who have said yes to following Jesus Christ in baptism.

That's why we clap. That's why we cheer. That's why some of the people in the tub, honestly, splash a little bit more than they need to. It's a celebration. This isn't meant to be a trip to the DMV. We celebrate this calling. We find ways to continue to do that over the course of our lives as Christians.

We do that every time we take the Lord's Supper. We're reminded of the gift we've been given through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We continue to celebrate when we share the stories about how the Lord has saved us and how he's working in

us. We continue to celebrate when we sing together and remind ourselves and others of the beautiful truths of the gospel and what we have. Amen?

So, this calling is something we continue to find ways to celebrate, but you need to hear this. The calling does not just come with celebration; it also, like Elisha, comes with a sacrifice. The calling, as a believer, is a high calling that we've been called into. We also see that in this picture of baptism. Yes, it's a celebration, but what are you going to hear? You're going to hear two questions that are symbols of the high calling we've been given, the sacrifice it's going to require of us.

Here are the two questions every person is going to hear today: Are you willing to go wherever God asks you to go, and are you willing to do whatever God asks you to do? Those are very hard questions, because what it's going to require of you is to say no to many of the things that would be natural to you, and it requires you to say yes to many of the things God wants for you that would not be natural to you.

Here's what Jesus says about this calling. We see this in Mark 8. ***"And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me...'"*** He's saying, "If anyone is going to follow me, here's what's required." ***"...let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*** That's what Jesus is reminding us.

To deny ourselves means to say no to the things that are natural to us and say yes to the things God wants for us. Here's what you need to hear: Stepping into our calling to follow Jesus will require sacrifice. It *will*. One of the greatest differences between real Christianity and cultural Christianity is the mark of Elijah. It's the willingness to make sacrifices for the calling we've been given.

You know this is true. For people in our cities, there are going to be a lot of people who are going to claim Christianity until it costs them. They're going to claim the name of Jesus Christ until it interferes with their career path or their sexual desires. They're going to claim Jesus until it requires something they don't want to give when it comes to their time, their talents, and their treasure.

You have seen this. We're going to continue to see this. Many people will walk away or drop the mask when following Jesus gets too personal or too public or too painful, because when God calls us, he's calling us to make sacrifices. Here's what you see with this picture of Elisha: when God calls us, sometimes it means we're going to have to burn some plows.

I want to ask you this. I want you to think about this. What plow in your life might God be calling you to burn in order to follow him and be more fully devoted to him?

What is that for you? What's a thing that's going to keep you or *is* keeping you from truly following Jesus Christ?

Maybe, for you, the plow God is calling you to see and to burn is the plow of relationships. Maybe, for some of you, that's a boyfriend or girlfriend who doesn't love Christ or, even worse, is pulling you away from him. Maybe your plow is friendships. Every time you get together with them, they're pulling you back into alcohol or substances or gossip or lust.

Maybe, for some of you, that plow is the plow of reputation. You're holding on to it because you know if you come out as a Christian, it's going to come with a cost. People are going to look at you differently. People are going to misunderstand you. But here's the reality: when you hold on to that plow, you can't carry the cross of Jesus and manage your image at the same time.

Maybe, for some of you, the plow you need to burn is a good thing. Maybe it's something like significance. I know a guy who had to make this real-life decision. He was offered an incredible job. It came with this massive pay increase and a lot of significance and influence. It was going to make him travel all the time.

He said, "Guys, this is a plow in my life that I'm going to have to burn, because what is it going to do? If I take this, it is going to fundamentally change the relationship I have with my wife and my kids. I'm not going to be able to be involved in church and live out the calling the Lord has given me here. I can have everything except for the things that are most important." So he turned it down.

On paper, in the eyes of the world, what he did was crazy, but what he was doing was saying, "I'm going to invest in something much more significant than saying yes to success." For some of you, the plow you may need to burn is a temptation in your life. For many people, that's your phone or social media. You've been praying for purity, but you still have not deleted the apps.

Some of you have been asking the Lord to help you fight the temptation on your smartphone, but for whatever reason, you have more traps on that than in an Indiana Jones movie. But you keep clinging to this. Listen. Here's what you need to hear. If you never burn your plow, you will always be tempted to go back to the field.

So, I want to ask this again. What is that plow in your life? What's the thing that's keeping you tethered to your old life and keeping you from following Jesus with devotion? Our calling, as followers of Jesus, *will* require some Elisha-like sacrifices, but here's the reality you also need to hear: what we get in return for following Jesus is always better than that plow you're going to have to burn.

Whatever you get in following Jesus is always going to be better than that plow, because here's what we get by following Jesus. We get peace and purpose and significance, eternal significance, and even, most important of all, we get Jesus Christ himself, who loves us and gave himself up for us, who led the way in sacrifice.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that that's true? My prayer for you is that you *would* believe that and that God would give some of you plow-burning faith today. So, the first thing God is calling all of us into is to be followers of him. That gives you a picture of what that entails.

Here's the second call we've all been given. We, as believers, need to know this. You have not just been called to follow Jesus; each and every single one of you has been called to *ministry*. God is calling all believers to ministry and mission. If you're a Christian, you *are* in ministry. Some of you need to hear that. It's not just for seminarians; it's for all of the saints.

Just like Elijah did with Elisha, Jesus is putting his mantle of ministry on each and every single one of your shoulders. Jesus is putting a new plow of ministry in your hands, and here's your job description. Here's what it means for you to be in ministry. You are called to represent Jesus and advance his mission. That's your call, guys. You've heard those two things. You're called to follow Jesus, and you're called to ministry.

The only question we have left is...*Where?* Where is Jesus calling you to represent him? Where is Jesus calling you to advance his mission? For some of you, what that looks like is God is calling you to do the exact opposite of Elisha. For many of you, God is not calling you to go; God is actually calling you to stay.

Maybe that's encouraging for you. Some of you are like, "Okay. I don't have to quit my job or move or whatever that might be." But listen. Here's what it *does* entail. It means you starting to see wherever he has called you right now as your place of ministry, where you live, learn, work, and play...your home, your job, your school. God is calling you to see that as the place where you are called to represent Jesus and advance his mission.

I know we preach about that a lot here at Two Cities Church, so my hope is that many of you have already connected that. You're excited about it. You have vision. But I do want to speak to another person in the room. You need to hear this. I imagine some of you look at the circumstance or situation you're in right now, and you may wish God was calling you to something else, because when you think about where you are and where God is calling you, that may fill you with discouragement. It may fill you with disappointment.

I know many of you feel that, because what does it look like? You're probably feeling what Elisha felt like some days on the farm. Every day, you get up and go back out to the field. Every day, you're stuck looking at ox rears. Every day, you guys are going to the same place, doing the same tasks, with the same people. You feel like you're in *Groundhog Day*.

You're getting up and seeing an endless list of patients. You have an endless pile of paperwork. You close one deal, and then you move right on to the next. Moms, you wake up every day to more diapers and dishes and dirty laundry. Every day. It's like, "Man, what on earth?" I imagine, when you get into that rhythm, it's easy to think, "Isn't there more to this? I almost would prefer if God called me to something else so I can feel like I have some more spiritual significance in my life."

I want to encourage you again. You're not alone. There are many people in this room who feel that. There are many people in Scripture who feel that, but I also think there's a good word for you here. There's a beautiful picture of this in Mark, chapter 5. Jesus comes along, and he finds someone who's possessed with demons. Jesus frees him. I want you to hear the response to this. It's in Mark 5:18.

"As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged [Jesus] that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, 'Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled."

Listen. I want to encourage you. Sometimes the most faithful thing you can do isn't to go somewhere new; it's to stay and be faithful right where Jesus has placed you. I had to learn this firsthand many years ago. A long time ago, I moved here to Winston-Salem, and for the first two years of my life, I knew God had called me to ministry, but here's what that looked like for me. Here's how it played out.

When I was here in Winston, I was always looking ahead to where it was that God was calling me. I knew it wasn't going to be here in Winston. I thought it was going to be somewhere else in North Carolina, maybe even a different state entirely, so I was always thinking ahead. Here's what happened over the course of those two years: I continually, over and over, missed out on what the Lord was doing right here in Winston-Salem.

I don't know what it was, but there was something at the end of those two years when God opened my eyes to that fact and that reality, that he had put me right in the midst of all this gospel opportunity and for two years of my life I had completely missed out. That filled me with guilt. That filled me with conviction.

But do you know what the Lord did after that? When I finally had my eyes opened (this was early 2016), he brought along a guy named Kyle Mercer who was planting a church here in Winston-Salem. Kyle invited me. "Man, would you stay in Winston-Salem and be a part of this?" I think God was so gracious to open my eyes to see the gift he was giving me here in this city, to see the work he had right here.

I think the Lord gave me this opportunity to step in and be obedient, to stay here, see this opportunity, be a part of it. It's one of the best steps of obedience I've ever made in my life. I've seen what the Lord has done here in this city. I've seen the way he uses this church and how I get to be a part of it.

For some of you, if God is calling you to stay, I want you to consider what it would look like for you to joyfully step in where he has you. If God is calling you to stay right where you are, what would it look like for you to joyfully engage in ministry right where you are? Maybe, for some of you, the best thing you can do this week is to figure out how to connect your calling to the kingdom.

Where he has you right now... What kingdom work does the Lord have for you there? Maybe he's inviting you to see your customers or your clients. Maybe there are brothers and sisters in Christ he's calling you to joyfully serve, or maybe there are people apart from Christ who need to see Jesus in you. Maybe, for some of you, you need to look at every opportunity you have with your kid as a divine opportunity to be raising them in Jesus Christ.

You guys, I don't want you to underestimate what God can do through your ordinary obedience, because the harvest might not be somewhere else. It might be right where you are if only you have eyes to see the opportunities he has placed in front of you and the willingness to say, "Lord, here I am. Use me."

Some of you need to hear this: not everybody is called to go. But here's the other thing some of you need to hear: Some of you *are* called to go. Some of you *are* getting the call that Elisha got. Some of you *are* going to be called to quit your job so you can take another job that's going to give you more gospel opportunities. Some of you are going to be called to move. Maybe it's to move back home, not for convenience's sake but for mission's sake.

Here's the last thing I really want to challenge some of you with here today for the rest of our time. Maybe God is even calling some of you to consider saying yes to full-time vocational ministry. Listen. The church has done something incredibly well over the last couple of decades. We've recovered this vision for ordinary, everyday believers to step into ordinary, everyday ministry wherever God has called them. Praise the Lord for that. We see the church on mission more than ever.

But something else has happened at the same time, some loss we've experienced as the church that we can't afford to lose. The church has lost the vision of calling men and women into full-time vocational ministry. Here's how I know that: Less than 1 percent of Christians are serving in that capacity somewhere right now, and that number is shrinking. That should probably discourage us.

But, listen. I do not believe that has to be the story in our communities. I don't believe that has to be the story *here* at Two Cities. Here's what I believe, and I've heard from other people who are looking at our church, and they're saying the same thing. I believe God is doing something unique here at Two Cities Church. I already see how God is raising up a generation of future pastors, church planters, missionaries, and ministry leaders right here in this room, and I believe that is going to continue for decades to come.

So, here's my challenge for you guys as you consider that. As you guys hear God may be calling some of us here to full-time vocational ministry, here's my challenge: don't check out. Some of you have already checked out. You're thinking about lunch now. Listen. God may be calling some of you. God may be calling some of your children, he may be calling your roommate, or he may be calling your spouse, and it's happening when you least expect it.

Some people are like Samuel in the Bible. They know from a very young age that they're going into full-time ministry, but for most people, the call to ministry for them is much more like Elisha. It came out of nowhere. It came when they were already doing something they were actually pretty successful at. So, don't rule yourself out, because it doesn't matter how young or old you are.

It doesn't matter if you're mid-career or near retirement. It doesn't matter if your kids are teenagers or toddlers. God has the habit of calling people to full-time ministry who never thought they were called. We see that all throughout the Scriptures. We see fishermen and tax collectors, people who by no right would have ever been called. We see this happening even in our church. We have men and women who are leaving great vocational work to step into this calling.

I believe at Two Cities we are going to be an Elijah church. We're going to be the type of church that is putting the mantle on top of people who we see are called to ministry. So, what's that going to look like for us? We're not going to try to guilt or manipulate people into it, but we *are* going to challenge people.

Here's what we're *not* going to do. We're probably not going to, at the end of service, have the worship team play "Just as I Am" one more time and say, "Man, we're going to play it one more time. The Lord is calling some of you. Come down here and give

your life to full-time vocational ministry." We're probably not going to do that. Maybe. We'll see what happens at the end of this service. I'll let you be surprised.

But here's what we *are* going to do. Every time this calling comes up in Scripture, we're going to challenge you. We're going to challenge you to consider it. Our pastors and leaders are going to be looking into people's lives. We're going to be looking for that calling or that giftedness, and we're going to speak to them about it.

So, here's what I want from you guys. Whenever this call comes up, whether it's from the stage or whether it's in a personal conversation, here's what I want you to do. Whenever you hear this calling, I want every single one of you to genuinely consider it and pray about it. Whenever you hear this call, don't check out. I want you to genuinely consider it and pray for it.

Anytime somebody has asked me to consider a different ministry position or opportunity, I may not want to go, but here's what I do: I genuinely stop and pray and consider it. I don't feel like God is calling me anywhere yet, but I'm open to whatever the Lord has in my life. So, pray and consider it.

Here's another helpful thing: pray and consider it in community. In fact, in every discussion guide, we're probably going to have, "Hey, do you feel called to ministry?" Community Group leaders are going to ask, "Have you considered going into full-time ministry? Have you considered going into missions?" Here's what I want you to do: consider it. Community is one of the most helpful things the Lord gives us to help discern our calling.

I remember, about a dozen years ago, some really good friends of mine felt the call to full-time missions. They brought it up in our Community Group, and for a year we processed it together with one another. Now I can say that they have been serving overseas for a dozen years. It's amazing to see the use God used in their life with community.

So, pray about it. Consider it. Talk about it in community. But here's the reality: some of you may not be called, but God may be calling some of you to help call *others*. Maybe God has put people in your life that you're able to see some of this giftedness, some of these different things, and God may be using you to be the one who nudges them in the direction that he might be calling them. So, don't be afraid to have the "I see in you" conversations with other people.

Some of you might be thinking, "I think this might be me. If I'm being honest, I've been thinking about this and been praying about it. Maybe the Lord is pricking my heart. What do I do with that? How do I know for sure?" I want to give you four

categories that we talk about here at Two Cities to help people discern if they're called.

First, *do you have a genuine desire?* Do you want it? Not out of pride or for some platform, but is there something called a *holy ambition* in you? This is what the apostle Paul talks about in 1 Timothy 3 when he says, ***"If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."***

This is the kind of desire that your heart just begins to beat faster when you think about preaching or shepherding or serving the church. It's the kind of desire that's motivated by "Man! I have this deep love for Christ. I have this deep love for the church. I can't even imagine doing anything else with my life besides serving in this way."

Secondly, *do you have affirmation?* Do other people see this in you? Listen. Not just your mom or a seminary admissions office. Plenty of seminaries are going to take your money even if they shouldn't. What you need to look for in affirmation is... Truly called people are going to have church leaders and mature believers saying things like, "Man, I see this in you" or "Have you ever considered doing this full time?"

There are going to be those types of people who are looking into your life and seeing spiritual fruit in the ways you're currently leading in the church. They're the ones who are giving you more leadership. They're giving you more responsibility. They're looking at the people who are actually following you. Do you have people actually following you? Do you have people who are being blessed by the ministry you're doing? If you see that, then maybe the answer is "Yes."

You may be getting a lot of "yeses" from people, but here's also what you need to hear in that. If someone looks at you and gives you a "Hey, yes, I think so, but not yet," or maybe they say, "Hey, I know you think you're called to *this*, but have you considered *this* path in ministry? I think you may be a better fit for this," here's what you need to do: you need to humbly receive that. I've seen this over and over again. God is uniquely using people who are helping affirm you to help shape your calling. It's so helpful.

I've seen this in a number of ways. I'll just say this. Quick story. Around the time I was helping launch Two Cities, I was still thinking about church planting, and I gave a call to my friend Dave. Dave is over a national network of church planting. So, I called him up and said, "Man, do you think I'm going to plant a church?"

He said, "Can I be honest with you? I don't know if you are. I'm still not sure that you have that personality or giftedness." And you know what? Dave was right. I figured,

after a couple of years in ministry, I was just not wired for that. So, he was honest with me and helped clarify my calling.

That leads us to the third category: *Do you have ability?* "Has God gifted me for this?" You don't have to be fully formed, but you should show signs of God-given potential. You should have a willingness to be stretched and grown, because there's a big difference between functional and gifted.

Let me give you another picture of that. Did you know I was the first-ever worship leader here at Two Cities Church? That might shock you. It was one time, and I never got asked back. Here's why: I was functional at it...I can functionally sing, and I can functionally play guitar or piano, but I'm not gifted at it in the same way Donovan and many others here are.

Listen. Trying to do something because you're functional is not going to work out well for you in ministry. You have to figure out "Where has God gifted me in my abilities? That's what I need to step into."

Here's the last thing you should look for: *opportunity*. Is God opening up doors? Stepping into your calling often begins by stepping through an open door. So look around. Is there a residency that's available to you? (Shameless plug for Two Cities Residency.) Is there a ministry team you can join?

Are there opportunities for you to start figuring out what it looks like to be on the mission field? Is there a pastoral position that seems to be open to you? If God is opening the door, walk through it. But you also need to recognize, on the flip side, if doors always seem to be closed, then maybe God has something else for you.

So, what if that's you? What if you're thinking through those four things, like, "Man! I think I might be genuinely called. What should I do?" Here's what I want to invite you to do: Have a conversation with me. Have a conversation with Pastor Stephen. Have a conversation, if you're called to missions, with our director of missions, Vinny Paolucci. We would love to explore what this looks like for you and talk about some next steps.

Here's what you can expect. If you feel called to this and someone is affirming this, here's what you should always expect: a season of preparation. I want to look in our passage one last time. At the end of verse 21, it says, ***"Then [Elisha] arose and went after Elijah and assisted him."***

Here's the reality: Elisha didn't immediately start slinging miracles around. He didn't start calling out and confronting kings. He started out by carrying Elijah's bags. What you're going to see is Elisha fades into the background. He doesn't show up again

until 2 Kings 2. Do you know how many years are between here and then? Eighteen years.

That's not a delay, guys; that's discipleship. That's the discipleship that the Lord is using. All too often, when people feel called to vocational ministry, they want or expect to be given a platform. They want or expect to be given a team they can be put over. They want or expect to be able to go out on the mission field right away.

Here's something that was helpful for me. A long time ago, when I was in Louisville, Kentucky, I was at a church, and they had something similar to the Weekender. So, a bunch of other guys from seminary and I went to this Weekender. We were excited about plugging into this church, but they had a special session for us seminary people at the end of that Weekender.

Daniel Montgomery, the pastor who was there, pulled us all aside. He looked us in the eyes, and he was like, "Guys, I need you to understand something. I need you to understand that you are not going to be given a microphone here. You are not going to be given a title here.

You might spend three years here, and you're never going to elevate beyond the lowest serving position. But here's what I *can* tell you. If you want to be prepared for ministry, we're going to help you, but here's what that means: You just come and learn. You just come and serve."

I wish I could tell you that all of the guys came back after that, but that would not be true. Most of them never came back. Here's what I learned firsthand by following through on that: one of the best gifts God gives people who are called to ministry is, often, a season of humbling and preparation.

This is something we all need to hear, whether you're called to ministry or not. Before God ever puts you *over* something, he's usually going to put you *under* something. That's what Elisha did for years with Elijah. That's what the disciples did following Jesus around for years. That's what Paul did when he went into obscurity for years before he fully stepped into his ministry.

Remember, God called me years ago, back in high school, but it wasn't until almost a decade later that I was able to enter into full-time ministry. But that was not wasted time; that was time the Lord was using to form me and prepare me for what he had called me to.

Some of you *are* called, but you're probably raw. It's going to take some time. It's going to take some coaching. It's going to take you being stretched and surrendered

and willing to grow, but the end result is that it's always worth it when we align ourselves to God's plan and timing.

So, if that's you today, if you feel like you might be called, here's what I want you to do: receive feedback humbly. You may not be able to do what you want to do right away, and that's okay. That's normal. I want you to walk through your weaknesses and your wounds, because God is using your story to shape your ministry, but that's something you're going to have to surrender first.

I want you to trust the process. Trust in God's plan and timing. Trust the godly leaders who want to come alongside you and pour into you because they want what's best for you. Let me leave you all with this. What would it look like if this was the moment that all of us stopped straddling two different lives and fully stepped into the calling God has placed on our lives?

Some of you are hearing today for the first time that you've been called. For some of you today, this is an opportunity for you to be reminded and re-called to what you know the Lord has called you into. Some of you need to give your life to Jesus Christ for the first time.

For some of you, your step today needs to be burning that plow, whatever it is. Maybe it's comfort. Maybe it's convenience. You fill in the blank. But he has put it on your heart. What would it look like for you to burn that plow today? For some of you, God is inviting you and calling you into being an ordinary, everyday believer who's doing ministry wherever he has called you, whatever that looks like.

For some of you, the Lord may be calling you to full-time ministry. Maybe he's putting that mantle on your shoulders. What would it look like for all of us, whatever that might be today, to respond and take that step together? Whatever the call is, would you follow it? Whatever the cost is, would you count it as joy? Whatever the plow is, would you burn it? Let's be a church that doesn't look back. Would you all pray with me?

Father, we want to thank you for calling us right where we are. God, I pray that you would give us the courage to follow Jesus wherever he leads us no matter the cost. Father, I pray that you would help us to see our everyday lives as divine opportunities for ministry and that we would trust you in the waiting and preparation that comes along with it.

God, for those of us who are called to go, whether that's across the street or across the world, I pray that you would make it clear and that you would give us the faith to be able to say yes. Father, as we do all of these things, we pray that you would use us for your glory. It's in Jesus Christ's name we pray, amen.