

## A Church of Irresistible Influence

*“Going Global”*

2-27-11

Bonita Wood

We have spent the last three weeks looking at Jesus’ command and strategy on being his witnesses to the world. And today we are going to look at the last part of his 4-part strategy.

We found this command and strategy in Acts 1:8 – you will find it on your sermon notes.

**Let’s say that verse together one more time.**

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8*

As we have studied and meditated on this scripture the last few weeks, I want to suggest to you why I think it is so important.

As a church, we give our time to 100’s of different things every day.

And each day that passes is one more day we won’t get back.

If being witnesses of God’s transformative power is the one thing God commanded us to do, and we don’t do that, then we really are an organization without aim, without purpose, without direction.

But if we do that mission, if we do that one thing which God has given us to do then we have all the purpose in the world don’t we??

In the last few weeks Dan and I have talked about building bridges: as we learn what it means to be a City Reaching Church, what it looks like to have a regional impact to Dayton, Vandalia, Troy and the entire Miami Valley, and last week what it would mean to cross Cultural Barriers and what might keep us from doing that.

Today we look at building bridges that go Global.

There is no denying that Jesus’ intent was to build a **fearlessness** into the lives of his early followers so that they would not hesitate when it came to moving out from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and finally out of the country of Israel and start impacting the rest of the world.

It is what his intent is today for each of us as well.

### **LEAVING THE BORDERS BEHIND**

Today we are going to look at **Acts chapter 11** to help us understand what it looked like for the early follower of Jesus to leave the borders of Israel behind.

As you turn to Acts 11:19-21 – you may remember from last week that one of Jesus’ followers named Stephen had just been stoned to death because of his belief and this had been a defining moment in the life of the early church.

*This is what Acts 11:19 says: “Meanwhile, the believers who had fled from Jerusalem during the persecution after Stephen’s death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the Good News, but only to Jews. However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. The power of the Lord was upon them, and large numbers of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.”*

For these early followers leaving the borders behind meant going North –even as far as Antioch. For us that would mean maybe we would go North to Canada or South to Mexico.

**However, borders are not always geographical are they?**

If you follow Jesus’ ever-expanding strategy, you will notice that it means a person or church continually gives up their comfort zones – those places of comfort and familiarity. One of my favorite authors, Bruce Wilkinson, who wrote the Prayer of Jabez, also wrote a book called “The Dream Giver.” In it he talks about a person, referred to in the book as a Nobody, whose name is Ordinary. Ordinary is called to leave the Land of Familiar to follow God’s voice. God’s voice in the book is known as the Big Dream. Ordinary obeys and begins to follow this Big Dream and one of his first encounters takes place at the borderland. Listen as Ordinary is approaching the bridge to cross over into the Unknown.

(The Dream Giver, pg 27-29)

Notice the closer Ordinary got to actually crossing the bridge that led to the Unknown, the Border bullies became very personal – Mothers, Uncles and Best Friends. There are always plenty of reasons to never leave the comforts of this side of your border. But that didn’t stop the early followers of Christ and we can’t let it stop us – we can’t let **fear** keep us penned in.

I believe leaving the borders of our country , in the name of Jesus, might just be the most freeing experience we could ever have.

**IN fact I am betting my Tanzania mission trip on it.**

After all God created this whole wonderful world and loves all the people in it – not just us.

**And who are we to limit his view of where we can go and transform lives in his name and for his glory.**

Are you and I really going to tell God his limits on where he can send us to do his work? There are 4 elements captured in these verses today that make up a process that the early church, Ordinary and you and I must go through - in order to see Christ at work beyond the borders of our country and our own personal comfort zones.

**THE PROCESS**

**1. The first is: We only go when compelled by a force greater than ourselves.**

Look at Acts 11:19a again - *Meanwhile, the believers who had fled from Jerusalem during the persecution after Stephen’s death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria.*

For the early church that compelling reason started with the stoning of Stephen and the ensuing persecution of Christians that would come.

Ordinary went because his father urged him to by sharing with him his disappointment over the fact that he had not went when he had been given his Big Dream. Ordinary didn’t want to make the same mistake and realized that there was more to life than just him.

**So what about you and me? What would compel you to leave behind your comfort border and travel into the unknown?**

We aren't persecuted here in the US – at least not yet, although I believe a day will come when we will be.

However, God has given us the same Big Dream, the same command that he gave his early followers, *be my witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth.*

I believe we go when, like Ordinary, we wake up and realize that life is not all about us.

That there are other human beings, people who God loves, that he wants us to connect with and serve. That was what Jesus' entire life was all about.

It is what he wants ours to be about as well.

**2. The second element in the process is: We cling to what we know as long as we can.**

When we actually finally do go, we hang on to the things that we know just as long as possible. **That is because it is very natural for us to do this.**

For the disciples, what was natural for them was to talk and share the message only with Jews.

The last part of Acts 11 verse 19 says: *“They preached the Good News, but only to Jews.”*

If you have ever went on a mission project, especially to a culture that was different from your own, you will find that you tend to stick close by to those who have come on the trip with you.

That's because it is natural. You know them, they are familiar.

So you cling to them so to speak.

Remember where we left Ordinary – he sat down and was thinking.

Let me share a little more of his story with you.

[\(Read The Dream Giver, pg 29-30\)](#)

Even if we have broke out of one comfort zone, we try to cling to what is left of it – those who are familiar.

But then something happens.

**3. It is the third element in our process: Someone breaks the ice.**

For the Jewish disciples of Jesus, it happened like this... they were out of their country (their comfort zone) talking only to other Jews (still clinging to what was at least familiar) when:

Acts 11:20 says: *“However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to Gentiles about the Lord Jesus.”*

All the others were speaking to only Jews when all of a sudden a few of them broke past their fear barrier, their Land of Familiar, and started talking to some Gentiles as well.

The wall was coming down.

And when the ice breaks, then the last element can take place.

**4. Fear then vanishes and God becomes very real.**

Here is what Acts says in verse 21 happened after the ice was broken: “*The power of the Lord was upon them, and large numbers of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.*”

Too often too many of us let the comfortable ways that we are familiar with keep us from experiencing life.

**Life Abundant or to its fullest is what Jesus called it and it is what he came to give us.**

As I wrote this sermon I thought “Wow, this is right where Jesus is calling me right now.”

So I wanted to share with you today a little bit of my story and why I am willing to go global for Jesus to Tanzania, to step through my fear and leave my borders behind.

AS I was praying about and writing this sermon, I got out some of my old journals and looked through them.

In fact I got out my very first journal that I had started writing when I was pregnant with my daughter Jennifer who is 30 now – so I have journaled for a while.

My life had included a great deal of sexual abuse, which led to a great deal of alcohol and drugs over the course of my growing up and early adult life.

[As I tried to put my life back together and as Christ called to me this is what I wrote in March of 1995 ... READ](#)

God continued throughout that year to lead me out of one comfort zone after another. It was one of the most difficult journeys I have ever gone on.

[Throughout the year God held me, called me and moved me forward one baby step at a time until on my daughter’s 15<sup>th</sup> birthday I wrote this...READ](#)

Six years would go by as I left one land of Familiar after another as God called me into the ministry.

You see I was clinging very tightly at times to what is still familiar.

I have spent the past 10 years in the ministry – and God has called me over and over again to move out past Jerusalem to Judea and then Samaria and beyond.

Some have been baby steps and some have been giant leaps.

I have sometimes went willingly and I have sometimes fought it for a while, although in the end God is always victorious.

As he has called and I have obeyed, not only have I touched other lives in the process but I have been transformed in the process.

What has happened over the years as we have danced is I have learned over and over again that it is not about me.

At least not completely about me.

You see it is about me and my relationship with my Lord.

It is about me growing in my faith and in my trust of my Savior and Creator.

But by growing in those areas I learn that it is not about me.

It is about me witnessing to others about the transformative and loving power and presence of Jesus Christ.

It is about me trusting God as together we break through all the barriers that separate me from serving others.

It is about me sharing what Christ has done in my life and that he can do it in yours as well.

And so I find myself today being called to go and share that message with those in Africa and breaking through every barrier there is.

I never dreamed I would go to Africa. I never prayed to go to Africa.

But as I said - God and I have danced this dance together for a long time.

I have stepped out of comfort zones I never intended to leave.

I have pushed past Border Bullies and stepped through fear I never dreamed I could.

What happens though, is after you have done that and finally made it to where God has called you – after a while you find you have grown comfortable there now – it is your new Land of Familiar.

What happens then is you begin to think that you are the one doing everything here.

**So, God calls you to a new place in order for you to remember that God is the one who works the miracles, who transforms lives, who gives you the strength you need to accomplish what he has called you to – who breaks through barriers.**

He reminds you that it is not about you - but about you bringing Him to others.

One day as I was praying that God would continue to use me I stumbled upon Bruce Wilkinson's book the Prayer of Jabez.

I read that and I went to the Bible and read the verse in I Chronicles that it is written about - I have written the verse on your sermon notes.

*“Oh, that You would bless me indeed,  
and enlarge my territory,  
that Your hand would be with me,  
and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!”  
So God granted him what he requested.*

I have prayed that prayer now, almost every day, for about 10 years.

God has enlarged my territory beyond my wildest dreams and now he is once again enlarging it to extend clear to Africa.

(Makes me think maybe I should have quit praying it a while back.)

However, who am I to put limits on where God chooses to use me.

After all it isn't about me – it's about doing what Christ commanded me to do.

Remember Champion telling Ordinary that *what matters most is who you choose to please.*

Along my journey I have had Champions who have cheered me on, walked with me for a while, or encouraged me as I have traveled to other places.

They have been friends, family, pastors, books, small group leaders and others.

One of my greatest champions was my mother.

She had gone on many missions, even going global.

She used to say to me, “I will go wherever God leads but I hope he doesn't lead me to Africa.”

AS I was praying one day about this trip to Tanzania, I got to laughing as I recalled her comment.

I think when she got to heaven she realized she had been wrong and so she told God – since you didn't send me to Africa, send my daughter.

(Her and I will discuss that when I get to heaven someday)

**Will those of you going to Tanzania with me please come up and join me on stage now.**

This trip isn't about us – it is about us (the whole church)

God is calling TCUMC to break through every barrier that would hold us back from reaching out to those who are far from God, to those who need to hear the good news. After all if we can go to Tanzania – where can't we go.

Missionary C.T. Studd had this to say about his missionary work in China in 1885: “Some like to dwell within the sound of church and chapel bell. But I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of Hell.”

The sky is the limit. Or at least every place on the earth is.

And all of you get to be a part of this trip.

You get the opportunity to be Champions and in the process God will grow all of us.

**Let me share with you a few ways you can be our Champions.**

**You can pray for each one of us**, you can pray for our trip, you can pray for what God is calling us to do in Tanzania at Angel House and everywhere in between, you can pray for our safety,

Well you get the idea – you can pray.

In fact, I am going to stop for a moment right now because Pastor Dan asked if he could come up and pray with the team this morning.

Just a couple more things you Champions can do.

**You can encourage us when you talk with us.**

I have some friends who have let me borrow their Rosetta Stone Swahili CD's so I can learn a little of the language before I go.

I have been loaned a book on Tanzania.

I have had others tell me that they are excited for me.

You can be our encouragers.

**Some of us are still trying to get funds together to go.**

**You can help fund our way over there.**

At the close of this service we have a basket at the doors as you leave.

Feel free to put your donation in there if God is calling you to help financially.

Or in the upcoming weeks, you may mark an envelope with the words Tanzania on it and put in the offering plate.

I can't begin to tell you how much this will be appreciated.

**Soon we will learn some of the things we can bring with us that will help or** be a gift to some such as candy, clothes, etc – when we find out, we will let you know so you can help us provide for our Christian brothers and sisters in Africa.

See how many wonderful ways you can serve Christ and the children of Angel House even if you are not going on the trip - this time.

Because who knows where God will send you when he compels you to leave your borders behind, stop clinging to what is familiar, break through that ice so that fear vanishes and God becomes very very real.