

Message: “The Comfort Zone Part 1”, Week 5 of “Challenges Series”, presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 10-09-2016 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

In our ongoing series of challenges, we come to the challenge of stepping out of our comfort zones. When we do, God is able to produce amazing results. This was true for Ananias, a good man and follower of the way. He, like so many others, feared Saul of Tarsus who was persecuting Christians – men, women and children. We read about how God asked him to step out of his comfort zone in Acts 9:10-19.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

¹³“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Additionally, Jesus calls those who follow him to step out of our comfort zones. As in the time of Jesus, there are those who say they want to be a disciple, but when they count the cost, they turn away.

Luke 9:57-62

⁵As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

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⁵⁸Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

⁶²Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Let God’s words fall on fertile hearts. Amen.

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My mom and I had a great relationship. It began when God made a way for us to find each other when I was a toddler. She patiently guided me through my childhood and teenage years with strength and more than a few tears. And when I became an adult, she and I became inseparable.

I'm still processing her passing almost two years ago. You may have read my story in the newsletter about letting go of her things. Each time I visit my dad, I reluctantly return home with a van full of mom's things. She saved everything. Scrap books with every single birthday card she ever got since she was a child, her dolls, my Grandmother's aprons, the doll house she used to play with, anything that had Bell Telephone Company printed on it.

When I was cleaning out the hall closet, I came across her vintage 1960s green coat. Green like grass in late summer. She loved this coat. As I held it and felt the material, all the memories came flooding back to me... Sitting next to her in the car on Christmas Eve when I was five. Dad had to run back into the house because he “forgot something.” Holding her gloved hand as we walked into the downtown Prange's store on a cool November morning... I carefully placed the coat downstairs with the rest of the many things that remind me of Mom.



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There are days that go by that it seems I can't get caught up. I shuffle the clutter of my basement from one end to the other and back again. But I can't let go of Mom's precious things. The thought of it makes me uncomfortable. I know that the things aren't mom.

In our scripture, there was another man who wrestled with doing something uncomfortable.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. We read about him in the ninth chapter of Acts. God speaks to Ananias in a vision and tells him to go to Judas's house and find Saul of Tarsus.



Now, just to put this into some perspective, imagine you are a Jew in the 1930s and God tells you to go to someone's house and meet Hitler there. Not only that, but now, God wants you to put your hands on him and restore his sight.

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¹³“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard about the terrible things this man has done. The people he’s captured and even killed. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority to arrest all who call on your name.”

... do you do it?

This is where you have to ask yourself if you really do trust God. Ananias is asked to step not only out of his comfort zone, but into risk, danger, his own fear... he’s asked to do something that completely contradicts his own judgement.

But, God says, go! Trust me. This is important.

Ananias had not seen God at work behind the curtain. Ananias had not seen that The risen Christ had appeared to Saul and that Saul, later called Paul would become one of the greatest advocates of the faith of all time. He didn’t know that Paul would go on to write most of the new testament and would propel the church, converting thousands to Christ.



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In the book of Luke, Jesus has begun his ministry. He gives the 12 apostles power and authority to cast out demons and cure diseases. Miracle after miracle is witnessed and people travel great distances to hear him speak and be near him. As Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem, a man comes along who desires to be his disciple. Jesus explains that it's not just about healing and miracles, it's about putting God's kingdom first before anything else. There are two other would-be disciples in this chapter. One wants to follow but isn't ready to leave what he knows—he's not ready to leave his comfort zone. The other is one who Jesus calls to. This man regretfully has things to do before his discipleship.

Jesus is clear. He tells us that there is no excuse. If we want to be his disciples, we need to trust that God has taken care of things behind the scenes and we are going to be ok. There's no such thing as following Jesus when it's convenient or when things are going well. There's no such thing as waiting for the right time. And, there's no such thing as following God's plan for us while we hang out in our comfort zone.

What if Ananias had said, “You know what God? This guy Saul is bad news. I know you want me to step out in faith here and do what's uncomfortable... maybe if I wait to see if there's a real change in Saul first. Thank goodness we didn't hear Ananias say, “God, I'm really not comfortable with this.”

Thankfully, in regards to our discipleship, we aren't asked to have Hitler over for dinner.



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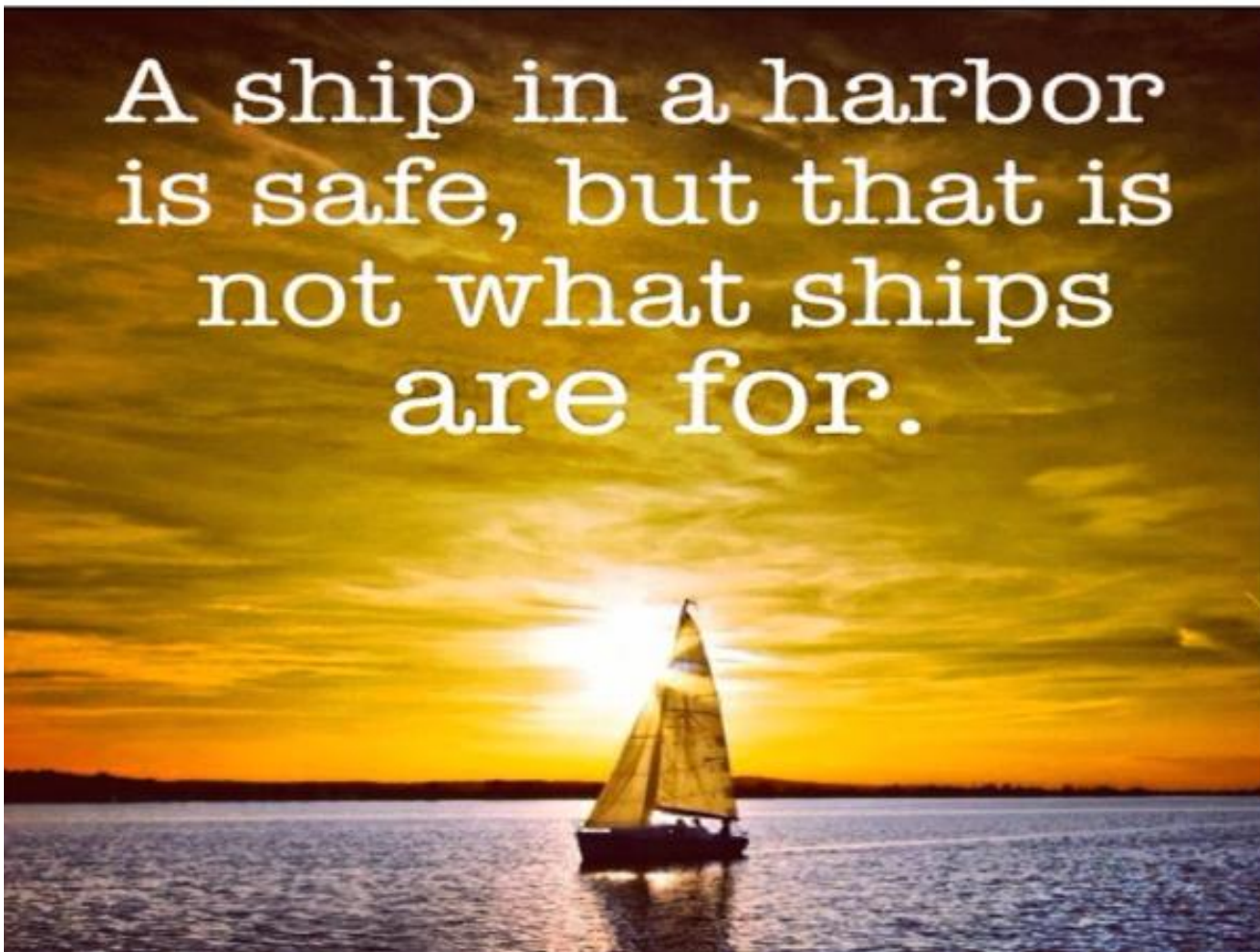


But we are called to step out of our comfort zones in different ways:

- like make Sunday morning worship a priority.
- Reach out to those in need
- Eliminate bitterness and anger in our hearts
- Forgive
- Give generously financially and with our time and talents

When we do this, God is able to open floodgates of blessings into our lives. God wants us to let go of those stale comfort pieces that hold us back, and move forward to receive all that He has in store for us.

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There's an old saying that a ship is safe in a harbor. But that's not what ships are made for.

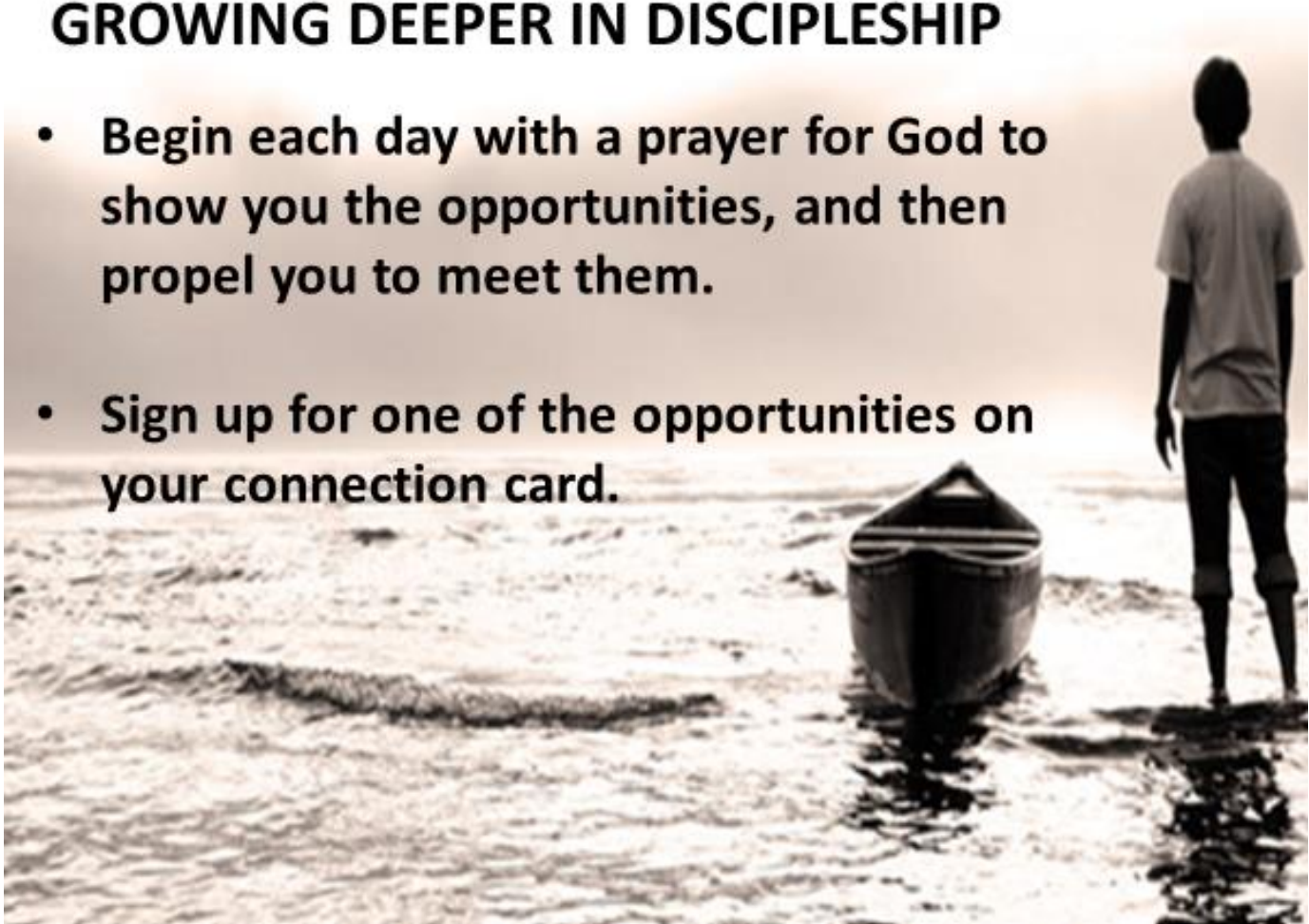
Disciples are made for more than occasional Sunday morning, giving what's left over in the plate, hoping someone or some agency helps those who are hurting... disciples are movers and shakers, always seeking to go deeper.

I've noticed in my adult life that I feel bogged down often. Usually it's in regard to time and energy. What if I trusted God enough in my life to provide for my needs. What if I let go of my mother's things and trusted God with my memories of her. What would it look like if I cleaned out her things... and some of my own clutter that brings me comfort? I'd have to trust that without the trinkets and just the necessities, God would care for me and I'd be just fine. Perhaps I'd even feel less burdened and lighter.

What would happen if I stepped out of my comfort zone regarding my time, my talents, my finances and trusted God? I'm glad Ananias said yes. I believe the heart of discipleship is stepping out of our comfort zone and trusting God.

GROWING DEEPER IN DISCIPLESHIP

- **Begin each day with a prayer for God to show you the opportunities, and then propel you to meet them.**
- **Sign up for one of the opportunities on your connection card.**



But how do we do this?

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