

Main Idea: When we’re living in light of our mission, we’ll make two types of ministry priority in our lives, as demonstrated in Acts 16:1-10.

- I. When we live in light of our mission, we make edification a priority (1-5).
 - A. It takes a team (1-3).
 1. To be useful you must know how to follow (1).
 2. To be useful you must have a good reputation (2).
 3. To be useful you must be willing to sacrifice (3).
 - B. It takes teaching (4).
 1. People need to understand God’s Word.
 2. People need to obey God’s Word.
 - C. It takes time (5).
 1. We must focus on spiritual growth.
 2. God will take of numerical growth.
- II. When we live in light of our mission, we make evangelism a priority (6-10).
 - A. Sometimes we’ll face closed doors (6-8).
 1. The Spirit said no to Asia (6).
 2. The Spirit said no to Bithynia (7).
 3. The Spirit didn’t say why He said no (8).
 - B. In His time God will open the right door (9-10).
 1. The Lord is sovereign.
 2. The Lord has people He is preparing to reach.
 3. The Lord uses available people to reach people.
 4. The Lord usually gives only enough light for one step at a time.
 - C. When God opens a ministry door, it’s time to move ahead.

Take Inventory: When I’m living in light of our mission...

1. I will do God’s work.
2. I will do it God’s way.
3. I will do it according to God’s timing.

We are here today, as every Sunday, because of Jesus. To get to know Him better, to worship Him, and then to help others do the same. When we read the book of Acts, we quickly discover that this is our mission. Our Lord gave this mission to us, saying in Acts 1:8, “You shall be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

But what if we falter along the way? What will happen to the mission? In a sense, that’s what happened in Acts 15. The church stumbled, first with a doctrinal controversy, which the Lord addressed through a church council; and second, with a disagreement between two of its heroes, Paul and Barnabas. Who was right? The text doesn’t say. What we are told is this in 15:40, that after the division a new missionary team of Paul and Silas was “commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”

That’s key. God’s work moves ahead on the basis of His grace, not His servants merit. Who’s right? isn’t the issue. The Lord’s work goes forward because of God’s *unmerited* favor. And for sinners like us, that’s good to know!

Now today’s text. When we live in light of our mission, it shows.

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:1-10

One summer day about ten summers ago I was just standing there, watching people get thrown into the lake. That was a regular Friday experience at Scioto Hills Camp for

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series at WBC in 2002.

the campers and staff members who've received a package during the week. Their "penalty" is getting tossed into the water.

Sherry and I were watching the excitement, and after the final camper hit the water I noticed people started looking at me. Not good. And then the chanting began, "Pastor Brad! Pastor Brad! Pastor Brad!"

I knew I was in trouble. There I stood in my nice and dry street clothes having a sense that the "nice and dry" part was about to change. I started thinking of ways to talk myself out of the predicament. *I'm too old for this. I don't have the right clothes for this. I don't like this. I'm a camp board member and I'll dock your pay for this.*

But at that moment, with excuses swirling in my mind, my daughter Katie looked at me and said one simple statement, "Remember, dad, *camp is for the camper.*"

And so I reached for my wallet and cellphone, handed them to my wife, and surrendered to the will of the masses. Which means I got shot off of the blob fifteen feet into the air and into the lake.

It's amazing what happens when you know what your mission is and then live in light of it. Excuses fall away when you're gripped by your mission. You attempt things you otherwise would never consider when you're gripped by your mission.

You don't work at Scioto Hills because you love the hills. You're there *for the camper*, to show the love of Christ to campers so they in turn will love and live for Him. That's your mission if you're part of the team at Scioto Hills Camp.

The truth is, every one of us who belong to Jesus Christ has a mission, to make Jesus known right where we live and to the ends of the earth, and today, we're going to be challenged to live in light of it.

You see, we are under marching orders from the King of kings and Lord of lords. We have a mission that will reap dividends for all eternity. The stakes are high. There is no greater undertaking than to devote yourself to the mission the Savior has given to His church, the mission of introducing people worldwide to Him (Acts 1:8) and teaching them how to live as His disciples (Matt 28:19).

The early church took that mission seriously, as we've been seeing in our study of the book of Acts. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth." And the church didn't wait for the world to come to it. The church went to the world with the goal that every person might taste the Living Water.

In Acts 1-12 the church reached the Jewish world. Beginning in Acts 13 the spotlight shifts to the efforts to reach the Gentile world. The main character in Acts 1-12 is Peter, whereas in Acts 13-28 God moves Paul to center stage in His redemptive program.

Acts 13-14 describes how Paul and Barnabas took the gospel to Cyprus and several cities in southern Galatia during the first missionary journey. In Acts 15 Paul had to travel to Jerusalem to put out some fires over the issue of Gentiles being saved, which the Jerusalem Council resolved with a letter. Following a disagreement over John Mark, the missionary team split. Barnabas took John Mark and returned to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and began what we call his "second missionary journey."

Missions occurs when we take our *mission* seriously. That's why Paul kept going to city after city even when there was rejection. But he didn't go blindly, nor must we. Our mission involves specific responsibilities.

You ask, "What are they?"

When we're living in light of our mission, we'll make two types of ministry priority, as demonstrated in Acts 16:1-10. Edification and evangelism. Or we might say, growing and going. Or maturing and multiplying.

I. When we live in light of our mission, we make growing/edification a priority (1-5).

To "edify" means to "build up." Ephesians 4:11-13 explains, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ *may be built up* ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

When we introduce a person to Jesus Christ, that person enters the family of God as a *baby*. When a baby is born, there's reason to celebrate. When a spiritual baby is born, there's reason to really celebrate! But we also know that when a baby is born, the work is just beginning.

Our mission starts with introducing people to Christ, but it doesn't end there. We must give attention to *edification*, to help them grow up, mature, and function in the local church. The job isn't done until that has occurred, until they've adopted the mission too.

"What's involved in edification?" you ask. We see three essentials in verses 1-5.

A. It takes a team (1-3). "He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ² The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."

The team started with Paul and Silas (15:40). The duo left Antioch and headed overland, intending to return to cities evangelized on the first missionary journey.

I urge you to look at a map. Look at the places mentioned in the biblical account. Sometimes I don't think we appreciate just how difficult and dangerous traveling was for these first century missionaries. The journey from Antioch to Derbe (that's about 200 miles) probably took the missionary team across the Amanus mountains by the pass known as the Syrian Gates. They went through the area where Alexander first waged war with Darius and his Persian army.

Though the text doesn't specify, my hunch is Paul headed for Tarsus, his home city. From there the team headed north across the Taurus mountains, doubtless by another pass known as the Cilician Gates. It wouldn't be wise to cross this mountain range in the middle of winter. LaSor conjectures that the group traveled through this region before the winter of AD 49-50.²

Paul visited Derbe first and then Lystra, reversing the order of his travels on the first missionary journey, since he's coming from the east this time. I wonder if anybody asked him about Barnabas, which they surely did. No doubt as he shared the story of their disagreement, it became a significant teaching moment to explain that even God's people differ at times, but we keep looking up, depending on His grace.

The scenery must have brought back memories for Paul, and not all pleasant. It was in Lystra that he healed a man lame from birth and heard the crowd cried out, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" (14:11). But moments later the fickle people

² LaSor, p. 244.

turned on him, smashed his body with rocks, and left him for dead outside the city. Oh yes, Paul remembered Lystra.

But there was a pleasant surprise waiting for Paul in Lystra this time. Timothy. This young man had come to know Jesus and developed quite a reputation in the area churches. They spoke highly of Timothy, so much so that Paul wanted him to join the missionary team.

I'm impressed by Timothy. We can learn a lot from him, for if we want to be used of God, we must possess three characteristics this young man exhibited.

1. *To be useful you must know how to follow (1).* In verse 1 Luke identifies Timothy as a "disciple," the term used throughout Acts to identify true Christians (some thirty times). A disciple is a *follower*, primarily a follower of Jesus but also a follower of those who follow Jesus. He's not a loner, nor an island. He is a person who has surrendered his life to the One who is his Lord and Master.

Let that sink in. There's a heretical disease that is paralyzing the contemporary church called "easy-believism." It's the notion that if you merely believe a few statements about Jesus, you are a Christian.

"Do you believe Jesus is the Savior and Lord?" the person is asked. "If you say you do in a prayer, then you're going to heaven!"

And the person responds, "Sure, why not?" But there's no understanding of what those terms really mean, no Spirit-produced conviction of sin and regeneration, and therefore no change of life that results when a person truly comes to know Jesus as *my* Savior and *my* Lord. Just easy-believism.

A person who substitutes easy-believism for genuine Holy Spirit produced faith won't take the mission seriously. Why should he? He has believed a message that says he's fine now, on his way to heaven. And while he has professed the name of Christ with his lips, you won't see Christ in his life, because He doesn't have Christ in his life.

That certainly wasn't the case with Timothy. He was a *disciple* of Christ, a grateful, committed follower who took Christ's mission seriously. According to 2 Timothy 1:5 & 3:15, Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois tilled the soil of his heart by teaching him the Old Testament Scriptures (1:5; 3:14-15). Then apparently, Timothy came to know about Jesus and put his trust in Him during Paul's first missionary journey.

Here's where it starts. To be useful, you must know how to follow.

2. *To be useful you must have a good reputation (2).* Luke says the "brothers...spoke well of" Timothy [KJV says he was "well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium"]. That's significant. Lystra and Iconium were towns some fifteen miles apart, which indicates Timothy's reputation went beyond his hometown. Believers a good day's walk away knew about him. He had more than a good local reputation. He had a *regional* reputation.

That's critical. You don't develop a good reputation merely by joining a ministry team. "Let them be tested first," said Paul of prospective deacons in 1 Timothy 3:10. My friend, if you don't have a godly influence on your peers now, it won't happen merely by signing up for an overseas missions trip. Timothy was a diamond in the rough and the church could see it.

And the church *should* see it. We ought to be looking around for the Timothys in our midst and encouraging them to pursue ministry. That's the church's obligation, to

identify, recruit, develop, and then send the cream of the crop into the ministry of the gospel.

I'm thankful for the Timothys who have gone out from WBC, and others who are being prepared even now.

Timothy would turn out to be Paul's #1 junior associate. The apostle later sent him to do trouble shooting in Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), as well as mop up work in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3). Paul later told the church at Philippi (Phil 2:19-22), "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have *no one else like him*, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."

Yet Paul ended up having far more than a working relationship with Timothy. In time he considered Timothy perhaps his dearest friend, referring to him throughout his letters as his *son*, such a dear son that just before his execution Paul wrote and asked Timothy to come (2 Tim 4:9).

Yes, to be useful you must know how to follow. And have a good reputation.

3. *To be useful you must be willing to sacrifice (3)*. Verse 3 says, "Paul wanted to take him along on the journey." How old was Timothy at the time? In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul later told Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth." The term could refer to a man roughly between the ages of twenty and forty. Timothy received that letter fifteen years *after* he joined Paul's team which would indicate he was somewhere between sixteen and twenty-five years old in Acts 16.³

Do you see the sacrifice here? Here's a young man with his whole life before him. He could make money or go after fame or enjoy the "good life," but no, he chose the ministry.

And think of what this sacrifice meant not only for Timothy, but also for his mother and grandmother. They knew this would be no pleasure trip for Timothy. They were well aware of the danger. They probably could still visualize the picture of Paul's bloody and battered body left for dead outside their city gate some five years earlier. They knew that could easily happen to their little Timmy next. But after counting the cost, all parties said, "Timothy, we support you. Go for it."

And so Timothy was ordained by the elders of the church (as 1 Tim 4:14 indicates) and left town with Paul to do the work God had for him.

Moms, dads, grandparents, are you willing to let your children go wherever the Lord wants to use them? Please remember that if God blesses us with children, it's so we can raise them and send them out into the world for His service. They are His, not ours. Is that how you view your children?

It's possible that Timothy's father was dead, as the force of the Greek verb in verse 1 would indicate ("his father *was* a Greek"). Eunice and Lois could easily have said, "We won't let you go, Timothy." But they didn't. Paul later commended them in 2 Timothy 1:5 as women who had a *sincere faith*.

But there was one "little" detail that needed attention before the team could leave. If you're still not convinced Timothy was willing to make sacrifices, ponder the next

³ LaSor, p. 246.

statement in verse 3, “Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, *so he circumcised him* because of the Jews who lived in that area.”

What does that teach us about Timothy? Plenty. Here was a young person who was humble, submissive, and willing to make sacrifices so others could come to know Jesus.

You say, “Why did Timothy have to be circumcised?”

He didn’t *have* to be, not for salvation, that’s for sure. That’s what the council in chapter 15 settled. Why then? We might say it wasn’t to open up the door to heaven, but to open up a door for ministry. We see here the principle of “becoming all things to all men in order to save some” (1 Cor 9:22).

It’s significant that when Paul recruited Titus, he didn’t circumcise him. Why not? Because Titus was a full-blooded Gentile and everybody knew it. Not so Timothy. He was born to a mixed-marriage, his dad was a Greek and his mother a Jew. If he wasn’t circumcised, the unsaved Jews would assume that meant he had abandoned his Jewish heritage. That’s not the message you want to communicate if you’re trying to build a bridge into the lives of unsaved Jews. So Timothy was circumcised.

Now answer this. How much are we willing to sacrifice so others can hear the good news about Jesus from us? If there’s something you can do right now to become a more effective witness for Christ, will you do it? Perhaps debt is standing between you and front line ministry (many young people couldn’t go to the mission field if they wanted because they’ve strapped themselves with car payments and school loans). Are you willing to change your spending habits and work hard to get out of debt? Possibly you could be more effective in the ministry if you took some Bible classes. Are you willing? Maybe you have something in your life that’s tarnishing your reputation. Will you give it up for the sake of our mission?

I’m not talking about works-salvation. Christ died on the cross for sinners and rose again. If you want to be saved you must put your faith in His work alone, and God will forgive you and give you eternal life. But if we truly appreciate the sacrifice Christ made for us, we will find great joy in giving our all for Him.

We’re talking about making a priority of edification, and that doing so takes a team. The second essential is at the heart of edification.

B. It takes teaching (4). “As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.”

Luke says the missionary team went from town to town. Remember where they are, in the region of Galatia, the same region where the false teachers tried to undermine Paul’s previous ministry by teaching a false gospel of works. That’s what prompted him to write the letter called Galatians. Now he, Silas, and Timothy went to those towns again, this time with the letter from the Jerusalem council.

Don’t miss what they’re doing. They’re *teaching*. This was a teaching ministry. As they went from town to town and talked about the decisions reached by the apostles and elders, they were teaching theology. They were using the Scriptures to address the subjects of God, grace, righteousness, law, and atonement. These were themes Paul no doubt taught about on his first trip, but now he goes deeper.

I can’t emphasize this too much. It’s not enough to lead people to Christ. We must help them grow. We must give attention to *edification*, and that requires *teaching*. To put it another way, people need two things.

1. *People need to understand God's Word.* That's why Paul's team went back to the same towns and "delivered the decisions reached by the apostles." If people are going to grow, they need to understand God's Word. But that's not all.

2. *People need to obey God's Word.* The missionaries didn't teach God's Word in a take-it-or-leave-it fashion. They delivered the decisions "for the people to obey." God's Word calls for a response every time we hear it.

E.g.—

We see a third, related essential for edification in verse 5.

C. It takes time (5). "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." Verse 5 is one of those "big picture" kind of verses. It gives us a panoramic view of what happened when first century missionaries went to a region. It gives us a lesson, too.

It's not enough merely to evangelize lost people. In order to fulfill our mission, we must link those believers into meaningful relationships with local churches. Since there were no churches in the regions where Paul went, he organized these new churches, trained and appointed elders to lead them, and made return trips to make sure they were standing firm. He even sent letters to the churches he established to help them deal with their problems in a God-honoring way (that's what the epistles are).

All that took *time*. Notice carefully the order in verse 5. Good teaching (given in verse 4) produced strong Christians, which resulted in growing churches. We see a vital ministry principle here.

1. *We must focus on spiritual growth.* If we do that...

2. *God will take of numerical growth.* It's easy to get hung up on numbers. In fact, what drives the way many "do church" is getting numbers. But that's putting the cart before the horse (which is a dangerous combination if you're sitting in the cart!).

The Bible makes it clear that if you have these three essentials—a *team* of godly followers of Jesus, the *teaching* of God's Word, and *time*—growth will occur. There will be spiritual growth, and there will be numerical growth, according to God's plan.

E.g.—

So when we're living in light of our mission, we'll give priority attention to edification. Maturing. Growing. This is what we desire to see happen here every week. But what about other places? Should that matter to us as well? Yes, as Paul and his team model for us in verses 6-10.

II. When we live in light of our mission, we make going/evangelism a priority (6-10).

Growing...and *going*. What happened next fascinates me. It's so *real*.

When I went to Papua New Guinea in 2001 I learned that a big part of missions involves just *living*. And responding to the unexpected. Bob Litteral told me about having to wait for an airplane to arrive in the village...for *seven* days. I get frustrated when I have to wait seven minutes in a line at the bank!

We discover three insights into going/evangelism in verses 6-10. First of all...

A. Sometimes we'll face closed doors (6-8). "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas."

We might as well face it. Life is full of the unexpected. The same goes for ministry. Should we plan? Yes. Paul did. He recruited a team intending to edify the reached and evangelized the unreached. Apparently, he even thought about where the most potential for fruit was. But then he encountered some closed doors. Three things happened...

1. *The Spirit said no to Asia (6)*. It wasn't because there weren't lost people there either, for there were plenty. In fact, there were a lot of important cities in the province of Asia Minor. Its capital was Ephesus, which some referred to as "little Rome" and "more Roman than Rome itself."

But the Spirit said no. "I don't want you to go there." In fact, the KJV uses the word "forbidden." As LaSor observes, "Paul's strategy was excellent. But his timing was off."⁴ He would reach Ephesus alright, but later. It wasn't God's time, not yet.

So he set his sights on Bithynia, a province on the Black Sea. That too, made sense. There were a lot of important cities there. But once again, it was a closed door.

2. *The Spirit said no to Bithynia (7)*. Notice the connection between the "Holy Spirit" in verse 6 and "the Spirit of Jesus" in verse 7. Remember Jesus' parting words? "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:20)."

It must have been frustrating for Paul. "Why did I come all these miles from home? I came to preach, but the Lord keeps closing doors!" Have you ever felt that way?

We now have people who were once members of WBC living in about 17 states and around the world. Many of them were vitally involved in the ministries of our church when they lost their jobs or had to transfer. God closed the door on their ministry here.

When God does that, He always explains why, right? Not exactly. In Paul's case...

3. *The Spirit didn't say why He said no (8)*. The doors kept closing so Paul and his team just kept moving. Finally they arrived at Troas, a coastal city, where they could go no further unless they started swimming. Some feel God used an illness to shut the door for Paul, since Luke a physician joined the team right after this.

Most of us don't like closed doors. We tend to think that a closed door means God isn't listening or that He doesn't care. Actually, a closed door is one of the ways God guides us. Paul and his teammates may not have known yet where God wanted them to go, but they knew for sure where they were *not* to go. Sometimes that's half the struggle.

James Boice offers this insight, "When God closes doors, it is not because he has nothing for us to do. He does not want us to take a vacation. It is to keep us from getting into a work to which we are not called in order that we might be saved for a work to which we are."⁵

I remember when I finished seminary. I wanted to become a pastor, to preach God's Word, so Sherry and I went to pre-candidate in Pittsburg, and in Oxford, Ohio, and several other places. No, no, no, was the result. Why not? The Lord didn't tell us...until He opened the door to Wheelersburg.

Here's a second insight about going/evangelism.

B. In His time God will open the right door (9-10). "During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

⁴ LaSor, p. 247

⁵ Boice, p. 274.

Now the closed doors began to make sense! God kept closing doors in Asia because He had a whole new continent for Paul to reach. The gospel was about to penetrate a region yet unreached, Macedonia, located in modern day Greece.

You say, "This seems kind of confusing. Closed doors. Open doors. Is this how God always works?" No. Keep in mind that the book of Acts is telling a story, the story of what God did in the first thirty years after Jesus returned to heaven. It's telling us what God *did*, not necessary what He will always *do*. For instance, before the Scriptures were completed, God communicated His will to His people at times directly through visions and dreams. And while God can do whatever He wants to do, now that we have the complete Bible, we don't wait for a voice, but look for a verse, so to speak.

But we do gain four important insights into how God works from this episode.

1. *The Lord is sovereign.* In his sovereign grace God led this missionary team exactly where He wanted it to go, west into Europe rather than east into Asia. My friend, that's why we are here today. We can only speculate what the world would look like today had Paul taken the gospel into Asia rather than into Europe.

2. *The Lord has people He is preparing to reach.* Just think of it. Were it not for the sovereign seeking of a gracious God, no sinner would ever be saved. But God is seeking a people for His glory. He is preparing them.

You say, "You mean God is actually at work in people's hearts, softening them, giving them a desire to hear His Word?" Yes. Listen to one, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And He's preparing hearts today, too.

3. *The Lord uses available people to reach people.* The Lord loves to redirect moving objects. Paul, Silas, and Timothy just kept moving ahead. They probably didn't understand why God kept shutting doors, but they knew He had His reasons. So they kept moving and they kept themselves available.

Are you available to God? Maybe you're in a closed-door-phase of life. Don't be discouraged. Resolve to be available.

4. *The Lord usually gives only enough light for one step at a time.* He doesn't put a floodlight on the whole road. Typically, He shines a lantern that lights the way for the very next step. And after that step will come the light for the next. Otherwise we'd forget how much we need Him.

Are we serious about reaching lost people? Then remember this. Insight #1—sometimes we'll face closed doors. Insight #2—in His time God will open the right door.

C. When God opens a ministry door, it's time to move ahead. Don't miss two important words in verse 10 (NIV), "After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready *at once* to leave for Macedonia." In the ESV it's one word, "Immediately." Let this sink in. When God opens a ministry door, it's time to move ahead, without delay, without hesitation, and without fear.

G. Campbell Morgan was right when he said, "It is better to go to Troas with God, than anywhere else without Him." God had some first-rate evangelism opportunities waiting for this missionary team once it arrived in Philippi. And a jail cell, too, as we'll see next time, the Lord willing.

A one-legged school teacher from Scotland came to J. Hudson Taylor to offer himself for service in China. "With only one leg, why do you think of going as a missionary?" Asked Taylor.

"I do not see those with two legs going," replied George Scott. He was accepted.⁶

C. T. Studd once commented, "I had known about Jesus dying for me, but I had never understood that, if He had died for me, then I didn't belong to myself. Redemption means buying back, so that if I belong to Him, either I had to be a thief, and keep what wasn't mine, or else I had to give up everything to God. When I came to see that Jesus had died for me, it didn't seem hard to give up all for Him."

It's no wonder he made this conclusion, "Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

Beloved, we have a mission, and it involves growing and going. Can you say that is your mission in life? I invite you to solidify your response with three commitments...

Take Inventory: When I'm living in light of our mission...

1. *I will do God's work.* Dear church family, there are people for whom Christ died who have yet to hear the gospel. They can't believe what they don't know. They can't know what they have never heard. They can't hear without a preacher. There will be no preacher unless we take seriously the work of God. I urge you to tell the Lord right now, "I will do whatever You ask. I will pray. I will give. I will go. I will encourage my children to go, if that's what He wants. I will do God's work."

2. *I will do it God's way.* An elderly widow, restricted in her activities, was eager to serve Christ. After praying about this, she realized that she could bring blessing to others by playing the piano. The next day she placed this small ad in the Oakland Tribune: "Pianist will play hymns by phone daily for those who are sick and despondent--the service is free." The notice included the number to dial. When people called, she would ask, "What hymn would you like to hear?" Within a few months her playing had brought cheer to several hundred people. Many of them freely poured out their hearts to her, and she was able to help and encourage them.⁷

Maybe you've been thinking, "If only God would open a particular door, I'd serve Him." But the question is, will you serve Him right now, taking advantage of the doors He has already placed before you? Will you say, "I will do God's work God's way?"

3. *I will do it according to God's timing.* Perhaps this is a waiting season for you. Then submit to His timing. He knows what He is doing. Perhaps He has opened a door. Then walk through it. You'll never regret it.

Closing Song: *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus* (#376) all four verses

⁶ *Pillar of Fire*, January First, 1983.

⁷ Source Unknown.