

Reach
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We're in a series called Forward in Faith.
 In this series we are using the word FORWARD as our outline.
 Follow – Obey – Reach – Worship – Abide – Resist – Disciple

We began by talking about what it means to follow Christ. Then we spoke on the O in Forward by teaching on obedience. We get this from the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 which says:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Some people think that making disciples only involves evangelism. But as we've seen, making disciples means to teach new believers the Word of God and help them mature in their faith and become like Jesus.

Also, following Christ includes making disciples of all nations.
 And making disciples includes teaching them to obey all His commands.

But what happens before discipleship and teaching? Before we teach them, we must reach them. So I am speaking on the R in Forward in a sermon called REACH.

The word reach has several meanings.
 It means to arrive somewhere – as in you reached your destination.
 It means to move your arm toward something so you can pick it up.
 It means to achieve a goal you've been working toward.
 It means to succeed in contacting someone you've been trying to talk to.

In the early days of our church, we had several different ways of expressing our vision of Touching Heaven Changing Earth. Those sayings included Knowing God and Making Him Known. Also – Reaching up in worship, reaching out in love.

As a church and as individual believers, we should be reaching up, reaching in and reaching out. Reaching up includes anything we do to touch God, to contact God. The primary ways we do that are through worship and prayer.

Reaching in speaks of the things we do to get connected, build relationships and meet needs in our church family.

Reaching out speaks of the things we do to get connected, build relationships and meet needs in our community. That includes outreach ministries like the homeless ministry and the nursing home ministry. That also includes what we do as individuals to reach others for Christ.

When we say we reached someone for Christ, it means we moved toward them and took the opportunity to share the plan of salvation with them.

Now, you might think you cannot do anything to impact history, but I want you to know that:

1- One person can change history.

Throughout Scripture, we find example after example of the power of 1. God used one man named Noah to save mankind from extinction. God used one woman named Esther to save a nation of people. "Oh sure, Pastor Joe, if you're Noah or Esther you can change the world." No, I mean one average person can change the world.

An average Sunday school teacher named Edward Kimball helped change the world. Who's Edward Kimball, you ask?

In 1855, Edward Kimball was a Sunday School teacher who took his responsibility to his class seriously. He not only taught; he visited the young men during the week to get to know them. One of them was a shoe salesman who Edward led to the Lord. That young man quit his job and became an evangelist. His name was D L Moody and he traveled the world preaching the gospel and led tens of thousands of people to the Lord.

In 1879, he preached in England and as a result, a pastor named Fred Meyer came to America. While preaching on a college campus, Fred Meyer led a young YMCA worker to the Lord named J. Wilber Chapman. Chapman got an ex-baseball player named Billy Sunday to hold a revival in Charlotte NC. It went so well that the local ministers held another revival and brought Mordecai Hamm to town to preach.

In that meeting a 16-year-old boy gave his heart to the Lord. His name? Billy Graham – who preached to more people and led more people to the Lord than anyone in history. And it all started almost 100 years earlier when a Sunday school teacher named Edward Kimball reached out. That's the power of one. One person used by God can make a huge difference in our world. That means you can make a difference.

There has never been anyone like you and there never will be again. And the things that make you special are no accident or quirk of fate. You have been created by God in order that you might make a difference.

You might not think your part is important, but we've all got to do our part – no matter how small it seems. You don't know the full impact you are having in people's lives.

When Edward Kimball taught D.L. Moody in Sunday School – he did not know he was THE D.L. Moody. When you work in children's church – you do not know who those kids will grow up to be. There may be future preachers or presidents in that class!

So many times we look at all the problems in the world and think, "I'm only one person, what can I do?" We get so overwhelmed by everything that we do nothing – but if we would just do something – we could impact everything. Edward Hale said, "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something; and I will not let what I cannot do hinder the something that I can do."

God can use you to impact future generations!

You may impact one person who is able to impact millions!

We look at saints like Paul, the foremost spokesman for the gospel who wrote much of the NT – and we think we can't make that kind of impact.

But Paul would've never become who he was without the influence of others.

2- God can use one act of obedience to impact the world

Acts 9:1-18 tells the story of man named Saul who hated Christians and wanted them dead until he had an encounter with Jesus.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Then he was blinded by a light from heaven and had an encounter with Jesus Christ that changed his life forever. He became a new man! God told him to go into town and wait for further instructions.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

Very little is known about Ananias other than he was a Christian living in Damascus.

That means he was one of the very people Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute. Ananias seems to have a small role in the New Testament. But without that role, Paul's ministry would not have been launched, his promise left unfulfilled and his mission incomplete.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

God didn't ask Ananias to do a risk assessment on witnessing to Saul. God didn't ask him to form a committee to evaluate the wisdom of witnessing to Saul. He just told Ananias to go and Ananias went! Immediately Paul was healed and he became the apostle Paul who took the Gospel to the known world and wrote 2/3s of the New Testament.

Ananias changed the world by obeying God and reaching one person. That's how great things are accomplished: God speaks and someone listens. God commands and someone obeys.

It happened for Moses when God spoke from a burning bush.
 It happened to Jeremiah when he was called to be a prophet.
 It happened to Joshua when he was called to lead Israel.
 It happened to Abraham when he was called to be the father of faith.
 It happened to the disciples when they were called to leave their nets and become fishers of men.
 It happened to Ananias when he heard the call to pray for Saul.
 And it can happen to you when you hear God and obey!

World change starts with God speaking and is accomplished when people hear and obey. What I want you to see in the story of Ananias is this:

3- There are some people that only you can reach.

Only you can get through to them. Only you can touch their lives. They need a touch from God and He wants to touch them through you! Only you have the ability to reach them!

You could argue that if Ananias didn't do it someone else would have - and you may be right. But God called Ananias and Ananias answered and Ananias was used by God to transform the world.

Ananias was not as gifted as Paul, but he didn't let that stop him and He was mightily used by God.

You might not think that you are as gifted as others, but that's okay. God can use a small gift to meet the needs of many people. We see that when Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 with one little boy's lunch.

Many of us get the attitude that the need is so great - what's my little offering going to accomplish? But anytime you serve in Jesus' name, no matter how small, it matters. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says:

Throw yourselves into the work of the Lord, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort.

Notice – nothing you do for God is a waste. It all matters, even the little stuff. Why? Because in God's eyes, there is no little service. Jesus said, "Even if you give a cup of cold water in my name to a child, that counts."

All service matters. You see the fact is with our limited perspective, we can't see how our small acts have big consequences, but they do!

Years ago two teenage boys went to a church service that was so packed out they couldn't find any seats. So they turned around and decided to leave. But one usher said, "Come on, guys. I'll find you a seat." And that usher personally escorted them down to the center and found them two seats. That night both of those boys accepted Christ and became Christians. One of them was Billy Graham who has now led millions of people to Christ. Do you think that usher is going to get any credit in heaven?

I'll say! We have no idea of the significance of small acts. So never belittle the little because it's all important. Real servants do every task with equal dedication because they know it all matters – whether it's seen or unseen.

You might not think you have much to give. But if you give God what you have to give, He will multiply it to meet needs you could never have met on your own.

You might think God can't use you until you get to a certain place in life. But if you let God use you where you are, He will take you farther than you ever could have gone alone.

You might think God can't use you now, you need to wait. But if you let God use who you are right now, He will make you someone you could never be on your own. That means you need to do what Ananias did:

4- People who overcome excuses are the ones God uses!

Ananias actually had more than excuses – he had legitimate reasons to be concerned. Acts 9:12-16 says:

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Now – Ananias had a tough choice when God told him to go to Saul of Tarsus – the man Christians were hiding from. And I can hear Ananias say, “But God – you do realize that Saul of Tarsus is a man on a mission. He came to town to kill Christians – which means he’s here to kill me!”

But God says, “I know who he is. And I’m sending you to pray for him. I’m going to use you to change him so I can use him to change the world!” And God can do the same thing through you!

I know you feel inadequate – I feel inadequate. You know why? Because in ourselves we are all inadequate! But 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 says:

We are not adequate in ourselves to consider anything as if it were coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who made us adequate to be ministers of the new covenant.

You might think you’re too weak, but when you are weak, God is strong.
You might think you aren’t smart enough, but God uses the foolish to confound the wise.

You might think you’re too young, but God says don’t let anyone despise your youth.

You might think you’re too old, but God says gray hair is a crown of glory.

I make no apology in saying to you that 1 of the most important things you’ll ever do with your life is to reach others for Jesus Christ. It’s far more important than your career, your hobbies, or anything else you can think of!

Listen, God does not expect you to be perfect and He does not expect you to wait for perfect conditions. In fact, Ecclesiastes 11:4 says

If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.

People who make a difference do the best they can with what they have for Jesus Christ today. They don’t wait. So – what are you waiting on?

Let me let you in on a secret -- there are always more needs to be met in a church than people willing to get up off their seat and say, “Here I am, send me.”
Most of us say – Here I am, send him.

And there are always more people that need to hear about Jesus than people who are willing to tell them! I'm challenging you to take the next step today and allow God to use you to make a difference!

We see the power of one all through the Bible. A giant named Goliath held the entire army of Israel at bay until one shepherd boy named David came along. And one man with faith in God defeated the giant and routed the enemy. That's the power of one!

One man named Haman was on the verge of killing all the Jewish people until a woman named Esther came along. She risked her life and saved all of her people. That's the power of one!

One day God looked down on His creation and people were so evil that God decided to destroy them all. But one man named Noah found grace in the sight of God. He obeyed God and built a boat by faith when it had never rained before. Thank God for that one man! Without him, none of us would be here today! That's the power of one!

And thank God that one day, one man named Jesus shed His blood on a cross and that blood paid the price for every sin every committed by everyone! One life paid the ransom for every person who ever sinned.

So I challenge you today to overcome your excuses and make a difference.

So many people in the Bible had excuses:

Abraham was old	Timothy was young
Jacob was insecure	Leah was unattractive
Joseph was abused	Moses stuttered
Gideon was poor	Rahab was immoral
David had an affair	Jonah ran from God
Jeremiah was depressed	Elijah was suicidal
Martha worried	Thomas had doubts
Peter was hot-tempered	
Naomi was a widow with no visible means of support	
The Samaritan woman had several failed marriages	
Zacchaeus was unpopular because he cheated people.	

But what was the common denominator among these people?
They quit making excuses and God did great things through them.

And if you quit making excuses, God can do great things through you!
You can share your faith with other people!
You can reach people for Jesus that no one else can!

And I want to take the pressure off you to win people to Christ.

God doesn't expect you to save anyone – He does the saving.
But He uses us to be witnesses by telling how Jesus changed our lives.
That's all you have to do!

And I know you can do it because God promised to help you do it.
You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!

So, today I challenge you to stop making excuses and start making a difference by
reaching up in worship and reaching out in love!