

Limitations

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

- [0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.
- But hey, we are excited today to get into the Word of God, but most importantly, to let the Word of God get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ.
- Now, in his book, S.D. Gordon gives this imaginary account of Jesus' return to heaven after his resurrection and ascension.
- And as he ponders, so realize this is fictional, just kind of made to help us to think a little bit. But as he ponders how this may have gone, he says maybe the angel Gabriel greeted Jesus and asked him, Master, you died for the world, didn't you? And Jesus answers, yes. To which Gabriel says, well, you must have suffered much. Again, the answer was, yes. And then he asked, well, do they all know that you died for them? And that's when Jesus says, no, only a few in Palestine know about it so far.
- [1 : 13] Well, then, what's your plan for telling the rest of the world that you shed your blood for them? And that's when the Savior says, well, I asked Peter and James, John and Andrew, and a few others, if they would make it the business of their lives to tell others.
- And then the one they tell will go on, and they will tell another, and they will tell others, and on and on, until we reach the farthest corners of the world with everyone knowing the thrill and the power of the gospel.
- And that's when Gabriel has this very confused look on his face, and he says, but suppose Peter fails. And suppose after a while that John just doesn't tell anyone.
- And what if James and Andrew are ashamed or even afraid? Then what? And that's when Jesus says, listen, I have no other plan. I am counting entirely on them.
- Now, I don't know about you, but when I first heard that story, it was a little intimidating. Because you and I are, according to the Word of God, his plan A on this earth.
- [2 : 22] And there is no plan B. If you are a redeemed, born-again child of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, you have this call to share the life-giving message of Jesus with those walking in darkness.
- And yet, when a mission of that magnitude, dealing with the eternal fate of others, is placed on our shoulders, or at least it can feel that way, what does our human nature just automatically do?
- Oh, oh, not me. Not me. I kind of just enjoy my comfy church with my kind of music and my close friends and my Sunday school class. I'm content. Let me sing those songs that I love and hear a fluffy message and take my communion and throw a 20 in the plate.
- And man, I've been churched for the week. Or it may sound something like this. I can't share God's love with others. Let's leave that to the professionals.

Preacher, you're just trying to get me to do your job. If you knew where I've been, if you knew what I struggle with, if you know my anger, my insecurities, I'm not even that well-versed in the Bible.

[3 : 29] What if they ask me a question that I can't answer? You know, over the last couple of decades, I've joked. I've joked about the fact that I don't feel bad at all asking you to step way outside your comfort zone to serve God because he shoved me way outside of mine, okay?

I jokingly say that this is revenge for me. And I'm just playing. But listen, I'm not a fourth-generation preacher. I didn't even pick up a Bible until I was 18.

I was voted most shy in my senior class at North Decatur. I am so task-oriented that relationships can be hard for me. I got a C-plus in public speaking my freshman year at IUPU Columbus.

I didn't go to Bible college to go into ministry. I just went to learn and grow deeper in my walk when God interrupted my plans with a call on my life that no one saw coming.

I don't desire to be up in front of people. In fact, if it were up to me, man, I'd be kicking Kathy off the computer this week in the back, and I'd be taking my seat and probably getting beat up in the process.

[4 : 39] So what did I just do for the last minute? I told you some of my limitations. I told you all the reasons why I can't do what the Lord is calling me to do.

And yet, if you hear one message from me today, make it this. Jesus is greater than your limitations. And here's why. Because it's not about you.

And it's not about me. It's about Christ in us doing immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. It's about the Holy Spirit transforming these hearts to beat for the lost and the broken, just like Jesus.

It's about me saying yes to the Lord, no matter what he calls me to do according to the gifts he's given me. It's all about him. And I'm called to be a willing vessel.

And here's the thing about whatever God may call you to do for his glory, because your calling may look very differently than mine, according to how God has wired you.

[5 : 43] Here's how Frederick Buechner put this. He said, The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness, in other words, your deep passion and the world's deep hunger meet.

So if you got your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Turn about two-thirds the way through to the book of Matthew, chapter 10, Matthew 10.

And here we see the story of Jesus sending out his 12 disciples, as Mark tells us, that they went out in pairs of two. And he gives them the power and the authority to perform miracles on this short-term mission trip, just like they had seen him do.

And the whole purpose is so that the lost may come to know the good news, that while we have sinned, we have a God who loves and who forgives and who calls us to himself.

And there's absolutely nothing in the world better than walking with Jesus covered by his grace. And so let's start in Matthew, chapter 10, verse 1.

[6 : 49] And I'm just going to tell you right off the bat that I'm going to skip verses 2 through 4, actually. I'm going to skip those verses because they actually are just like a list of the 12 apostles.

Okay? You can check that out on your own. But let's start here in Matthew 10, 1. Verse 5.

So this is where God went first, the chosen people, the Jewish people, and then it spread out from there.

That's always been God's plan, that they would be the light. Verse 7. As you go, proclaim this message. The kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick.

Raise the dead. Cleanse those who have leprosy. Drive out demons. Freely you have received. Freely give. Now, I want to show you three things today that jumped off the page to me as I was studying this passage.

[8 : 04] First, your calling requires his strength. Your calling requires his strength. And boy, did Jesus' followers understand this well.

See, up to this point, his disciples had simply observed Jesus doing ministry as he poured into them. John MacArthur described Jesus' training of the disciples in four general phases.

Number one, their conversion to Christ. So coming to know his lordship in the first place. And then number two was that calling to leave everything behind and be his disciple.

And then here we see the third phase that he calls an internship. Now, I am a big fan of internships because if we approach them with a heart to listen and learn, if we're coachable, they can teach us so much about God's calling.

And some of you may not be aware that I did two internships here at FCC under Pastor Danny Wolford. This would have been back in 2005 in between my junior and senior years of Bible college.

[9 : 11] The school required, so as part of going out, getting your degree and going into ministry, the school required that I did an internship, which I did for a summer, is I got to see what Danny did every single day and I got to participate in it.

And then after I graduated, the church here and I agreed to another internship for a year where I honestly got to do a little bit of everything.

I got to preach a couple times. I got to do some pastoral care. I got to help Josh Wolford do some youth ministry. I became the temporary leader of a children's ministry until they found someone.

And what I discovered is that my heart and my gifting was in preaching. It was in administration. And this church was a blessing to springboard me, to send me out into my first full-time ministry as a lead pastor that lasted for eight years.

And that was in Rush County. So yes, my education, just like the disciples got to watch Jesus for three years. My education was helpful. But the next step was to actually get in there and put that heart and that education into practice.

[10 : 27] And listen, basically, that's what Jesus is doing here with the 12 as they've been watching and learning from the master.

But now it's time for the internship. Now it's time to go out and be the hands and the feet of Jesus. And it says here that he gives these 12 the authority and the power to cast out demons, to heal the sick, to raise the dead.

Can you imagine being one of these guys and how intimidating this would have been? I mean, number one, there's a lot of powerful people who oppose Jesus and you're going out in his name.

Does that mean that I'm going to be harmed physically, they're probably thinking? Maybe even killed? Yeah, absolutely. Sure it could. Number two, what if we're not welcomed by the people of the towns as we enter and don't have anywhere to stay or food to eat or clothes to put on our backs or be able to clean up?

What if, number three, we get there and we go to heal someone and it doesn't work? We would look so foolish. There's the people-pleasing side. Number four, what if we don't know what to say when we're sharing the good news?

- [11 : 40] Church, these are real human questions because these are ordinary guys called by an extraordinary God beyond the level that they felt comfortable.
- And while the text doesn't tell us, I can guarantee you that they had their limitations. They had their excuses in their minds just like you and I do when God calls us to use our gifts for his glory.
- And what Jesus is doing is making it very clear that he calls us to ministry that we can't do in our own strength.
- Because what happens to believers and even churches when we start doing some things in our own ability and we leave God out of the equation?
- It becomes about us, right? Look at what I can do. Look at how successful we are as a church. Look at me. And I'm telling you, that kind of pride will cause a church to fall every single time and it will hurt the body of Christ.
- [12 : 42] So here's how 1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 28, puts it. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.
- It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.
- The reason God loves to use the weak things of this world is so that we can see that it's not about us. It's by his strength that we can fulfill the plans that he has.
- It's all about him. And I can tell you that each time I come up here to expound upon God's word, I don't take that lightly. I seek his heart as I prepare it.
- I ask him to guide me as I practice it. And I beg the Holy Spirit to get me out of the way as I present it. And I truly believe this William Booth quote that says the greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender.
- [13 : 53] For you to live the life, live the life that God is calling you to, for you to live out the calling that God has over your life, it will require you to be all in, clinging to Jesus and letting him do what he does.
- Now here's the second thing I want you to see. Your needs require his provision. As most of you know, in the month of January, we went through a series called Take God at his word.
- It was all about what it looks like to be faithful to the Lord when it comes to our money and our resources. And we discovered some awesome promises in the word where God basically says, I double dog dare you to trust me in your tithing and you're giving your offerings to build the kingdom of God.
- And you watch, you watch how I will meet your needs and bless you in ways you would never expect. And I love how a few of you have come up to us and you've shared testimonies of seeing God show up and pour out those blessings.
- We had a lady who I'll keep anonymous who came toward probably the end of the series in January. And she said, you know what, Ray, I've been a follower of Jesus for decades.
- [15 : 10] And I've gotten close to tithing at points. And if you're not aware, the word tithe means to give 10% of what we have back. So 10% of our income. She said, I've been close to tithing at points, but my bills have always scared me.
- I've always just felt like I couldn't do it with my bills. So I never did it. But now that I'm studying God's word, I'm done running from him in this area. She said, I'm all in.
- And then she said, the hard part was as soon as I made that decision, my insurance went up significantly. Something broke in the house and I needed to fix it.

I mean, she's probably talking like \$1,000 or more of expenses. And she said, listen, I knew that was Satan trying to deter me. And I'm not going to stop tithing. I'm going to trust God in this area.

And then she came back to me again about a week or two later. And she said, Ray, I have to tell you what God has done. I got a check in the mail that I had no idea was coming. I'd forgotten all about an annuity that I put in just a little bit of money probably 25 years ago.

[16 : 15] Forgot all about it. Forgot it even existed. And apparently it had grown over the years. So I get this unexpected check that took care of all these extra expenses I got.

And there was some leftovers. So I was able to pay off debt. Even had a little leftover for savings. And we both agreed that God owes us nothing.

But we said, wow, does God keep his promises? But I share that story as a great example of what we see lived out with these disciples right here.

Look back at Matthew chapter 10 with me. And let's start here now where we left off in verse 9. Jesus says, Now, this passage isn't an excuse for being reckless.

Okay? Okay? I mean, this is not like, okay, this should be the example for everyone. This was a very specific instance here. It's not permission to throw common sense out the window.

[17 : 33] It was a test to his apostles to prepare them for a bigger journey that would come in phase 4 of their training when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and on a mission without Jesus physically on earth with them.

This was teaching them that when you're walking in Christ, he'll meet those needs. And it's teaching us too. And Jesus does it in a radical way here. Because normally, he's good with us using the brains he's given us to prepare for a trip, to take extra food, money, clothes, and resources with you.

But here he was making a point. He wanted his apostles to see that God will provide every step of the way. That would mean asking for help, which is hard for a lot of us to do.

That would mean trusting people in each town to provide shelter and food and clothing. And the list goes on. So let me ask you, are you trusting God to meet your needs?

Like we've studied in God's Word, are you being faithful with those first fruits, giving back to him, trusting that he's got you and he's got your family in his care, that he is a big enough God to take care of you?

[18 : 48] I love this passage from Matthew 6, where Jesus says, talking about how we can worry about our needs, starting in verse 31 here in Matthew 6, he says, So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat?

Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

And do you know what happened on this evangelistic two-by-two trip that the apostles took? They went out in the power of Christ. They healed the sick. They raised the dead. They preached the life-saving message of Jesus.

And guess what? Every need they had, the Lord provided just like he says he'll do. And the same thing is true for us. So be faithful off the top.

Make that impact for the kingdom. Be smart with the resources God gives you. Live within your means. Stay away from debt. All the things that the American culture will not teach you.

[19 : 56] And God will continue to provide all we need and probably some of what we want. So, you feel like you have limitations financially to do what God is calling you to do.

No worries. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, as his word says. And if he inspires the mission, he will fund it as well. Here's the third thing I want you to see.

The last thing. Your impact requires you trust his leading. Your impact that you make when you do what God calls you to do, your impact requires that you trust his leading.

Now, let me just say that we're not in control of our impact. We're simply called to be obedient. Obedient, willing vessels that say like the prophet Isaiah, here am I, Lord, send me.

But in order to make the impact the Lord created you to make, we have to trust the Holy Spirit that lives inside of every believer, every follower of Jesus.

[20 : 55] We have to trust his leading. Now, let's pick back up here in Matthew 10, starting in verse 16. Jesus says, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.

Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Now, let me explain this. When it says be as shrewd as snakes, the ancient lore or the ancient culture that these Jewish people would have grown up around actually taught, now this may seem foreign to us, but they taught that a serpent symbolized wisdom.

And so he's saying be smart, be wise, say the right thing in the right time, at the right place. So be strategic and wise.

Follow the Holy Spirit's leading there. So he says be as shrewd as snakes, so be wise, and then as innocent as doves. So be pure, not abrasive, not inconsiderate, not belligerent.

Be wise and pure in your approach to everything. And then he says this in verse 17, Be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues.

[22 : 17] On my account, you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it.

At that time, you will be given what to say. For it will not be you speaking, but the spirit of your father speaking through you. By the way, this isn't just for this evangelistic trip the disciples were going to be on.

But I think these are words that are a bigger picture of the rest of their lives after Jesus ascended back up into heaven. Because these warnings turned out to be true for all these guys, minus Judas, as they went out to the ends of the earth to share the hope found in Jesus.

And all but one were killed for their faith. And the other one suffered greatly. So here's the deal. You can't fulfill your life purpose in your own strength.

And you can't truly make an impact without the Holy Spirit daily guiding and giving you that wisdom to know when and where and even how while you seek to live a pure life that backs up the message.

[23 : 26] And I love verse 19 because often when God calls us to something, it feels big and scary and intimidating. And yet you're just the vessel.

If you are in him, if you are following the Holy Spirit's leading according to the word of God, he will guide and even give you the words to say when you have an opportunity to shine to others.

So what are some of the limitations that you have? Have you been thinking about those while I've been preaching this whole time? What are some of your limitations? What are some of maybe the better question?

What are your excuses for not doing what God has called you to do? I'm too young. I'm too old. I'm too new to my faith. I'm too busy.

I'm too bad. I'm too uneducated. I'm too awkward. I'm too selfish with my time and gifts. I'm too scared. I'm too prideful. I'm too comfortable.

[24 : 25] I'm too damaged. I mean, there could be as many reasons as people listening to this. But those excuses, when laid down at the foot of the cross, will disappear as God desires to take your life and impact this world in ways that will shock and stretch you.

So it's this simple. Jesus is greater than my limitations. Say that with me right from wherever you are. Jesus is greater than my limitations.

And God specializes in taking the weak things of this world and using us for his glory. And you know what? I'm thankful for that.

Let's pray together. And listen, I want to do something a little different than normal. I want to pray a prayer by a man named Dutch Sheets. Kind of an interesting name.

But this guy has written a lot of books on prayer and other things. A powerful man of God. But I want to take a prayer that he had. I'm going to change a few of the words, paraphrase him a little bit.

[25 : 32] But I want to pray this prayer over you right now. So let's pray together. Lord, help us to rise to the occasion and embrace the incredible invitation to be co-laborers with you.

To be carriers of your awesome Holy Spirit and ambassadors for your great kingdom. God, we want to represent you. Awaken us to our destiny, Lord.

Help us to stop making excuses and just to simply follow you in obedience. And we pray this in the name above all names. The name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

And right for where you are, God's people said, amen and amen. Hey, I want to give you this invitation. If you have listened to this message and God has stirred your hearts and maybe you have some questions about your faith.

Maybe you're ready to talk about surrendering your life to his Lordship. Listen, don't wait another day. You don't know what tomorrow holds. So give us a call. Here's a couple ways you can get a hold of us.

[26 : 38] First, give us a call. 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488. Once again, this is First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

Check us out at FCCGreensburg.com. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. Or you can email me at Ray at FCCGreensburg.com. Hey, we hope you have a wonderful week.

God bless you.