

Not What I Expected: Navigating the Realities of Following God's Call

Life rarely unfolds exactly as we anticipate. Whether it's expecting your spouse to cook three meals a day or believing your children will be perfect angels, unrealistic expectations are part of human nature. The same principle applies when we follow God's call on our lives - ministry and mission work often come with unexpected challenges and situations we never saw coming.

What Can We Expect When Following God's Mission?

In Acts 13, we find Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark embarking on their missionary journey to Cyprus. This wasn't a vacation destination - Cyprus was known for its moral corruption and spiritual darkness. Yet this is where God called them to go, and their experience reveals important truths about what we can expect when we step into God's mission for our lives.

Reality 1: Know Your Purpose

The Goal is Always Jesus

Throughout Acts 13, Paul's team had one clear objective: bringing people to Jesus Christ. They preached in synagogues, proclaimed the word of God, and shared the gospel message. The result? People were getting saved, the gospel was spreading, and believers were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Every goal in God's mission centers on connecting people with Jesus - bringing them into His church and helping them grow to maturity. This happens through what we might call "bridge building."

Building Bridges, Not Walls

Think about the difference between the Golden Gate Bridge and the Great Wall of China. A bridge helps people get somewhere - it bears them up and connects them to their destination. A wall simply says "stay out" and "stay away."

When it comes to sharing the gospel, we need to build bridges, not walls. Paul had an automatic bridge to the Jewish community because he was a rabbi. After the reading of Scripture, synagogue leaders would invite him to share an encouraging word, which opened the door for him to tell them about their Messiah.

"I become all things to all men in order to win them to Christ" - 1 Corinthians 9:22. This means finding ways to connect with people through hobbies, work experiences, or personal encounters. You win people to Christ not by attacking them, but by loving them where they are and pointing them to Jesus as their Savior.

Reality 2: Expect Problems

Ministry Moves Forward Despite Adversity

The Bible is filled with people facing problems - David fighting Goliath, Moses confronting Pharaoh, Daniel facing lions, Joshua confronting city walls. Problems exist because that's how God demonstrates His power is greater than any obstacle. A problem-free life doesn't experience the power of God or develop the testimony that says "I know my God is real."

Four Types of Problems to Expect

Situational Problems

Paul's team walked across entire islands in sandals, facing hot days, difficult terrain, and uncomfortable conditions. Every mission requires movement into a mess. Whether it's dealing with strange bugs, extreme weather, or unexpected illnesses, following God's call often means stepping out of your comfort zone.

Opposition from the Enemy

The first major challenge Luke records about Paul's mission was facing a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus who tried to turn people away from the faith. In dark places, you'll encounter spiritual opposition. The enemy wants to distract and steal hearts away from salvation, using trickery and deception.

Persecution from the World

Paul's own Jewish brothers stirred up crowds to drive him out of the city. Sometimes the people you think would be most receptive to the gospel are actually the most resistant and aggressive. Family members and close friends might tell you to stop sharing your faith.

Desertion from Friends

John Mark left the mission and returned to Jerusalem. When those who are with you in ministry leave, it creates a different level of heartache. By departing, John Mark missed out on seeing entire cities come to hear the gospel, Gentiles getting saved, and the establishment of new churches.

Reality 3: Rely on His Power

God's Power Sustains Through Every Challenge

When Paul faced tough situations, he found God's power to be faithful. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, Paul admits: "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life... but in God, who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us."

Paul was shipwrecked three times, spent a night and day floating in the ocean, and faced countless perils. Yet he found God's power still sustaining him.

Standing Against Opposition

When facing the sorcerer, Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly confronted the deception: "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" - Acts 13:10.

There's a time and place to boldly stand against false ways, especially when it comes to the gospel. Paul acted in line with the Spirit powerfully, and the man went blind - leading to the proconsul's salvation.

Maintaining Perspective Through Hurt

When people fail you or desert you, it's easy to become bitter. The key is setting your eyes back on Jesus. "Consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your soul" - Hebrews 12:3.

At the end of Paul's life, he could say: "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" - 2 Timothy 4:16-17.

The Triumphs Make It Worth It

Despite all the challenges, Paul's ministry resulted in salvations, the spreading of the gospel throughout entire regions, and people being filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Lives were being transformed as Paul continued moving forward.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" - Romans 8:18.

When you follow God's call, you're joining Him in building His kingdom - something far greater than your individual life that will continue long after you're gone.

Life Application

This week, examine your approach to sharing your faith and following God's call on your life. Are you building bridges or walls with the people around you? Instead of expecting a problem-free journey, prepare yourself to rely on God's power through whatever challenges come your way.

Consider these questions:

- What bridges can you build with people in your life to share the gospel?
- How are you responding to current problems or opposition you're facing?
- Are you setting your eyes on Jesus when people disappoint or hurt you?
- What mission or ministry is God calling you to that you've been avoiding because of potential difficulties?

Remember, the ministry or mission God calls you to may not be what you expected - but it might be even more than you expected because the Lord is in it, and He does great things through those who trust in His power rather than their own strength.