

“MY READINESS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD”
by Rom A. Pegram (11/17/19)

I'm sure many of you could relate today if I mentioned that my father was very often 'the voice in my head.' 'Anyone else still hear their parents' voice once in a while? You know, those 'dadisms' or 'momisms' they've become famous for—sometimes more famous after they're gone...

Just to give you an idea of what kind of home I grew up in—a preacher's home to be exact, my father used to tell all of us kids: “Be ready to preach, pray or die on a moment's notice!” And he wasn't kidding...

I found that out one time when I knew he was headed to the Eureka UMC for a week of evangelistic services there and he asked me to come lead the singing. My response? “You've got to be kidding.” His response? I've taught you to 'be ready to preach, pray or die on a moment's notice!' That includes leading singing, if that's one of your gifts. So, I went ... but I've never forgotten that 'voice in my head'; it still rings loud and clear at times...

The truth is ... if God is going to use us, as part of his kingdom, we have to be ready, don't we? That's all my dad was really saying—BE READY, so God can use you for his Kingdom purposes. And that's exactly what our Bible character for today did—make sure he was ready. And the opportunity to serve God finally came. So, listen now to this really cool story from the Book of Acts, about a regular guy named Philip who God gave an opportunity to—to talk about his faith, and he was READY. It's a bit of a lengthy passage, so follow along with me, would you? Here it goes (Acts 8:26-38, NLT)...

As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”

³⁰ Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

³² The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

³³ He was humiliated and received no justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” ³⁵ So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

³⁶ As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” ³⁸ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

Now, this is an incredible story, isn’t it? God provided Philip an opportunity to talk about his faith in Jesus to this Ethiopian. We don’t know for sure, but this may very well have been the first African convert to Christianity. This could have been the very guy who went back to Ethiopia and started the Christian church there—began in the 1st century and continuing today. A great possibility...

But, here’s the point of this story today: If Philip had not been ready to talk about his faith to this Ethiopian government official, none of this would’ve ever happened. *You have to be ready!* And that leads us to our IGNITE principle for the week, which is: **God uses me when I am prepared to be used.**

The truth is, folks, GOD WANTS TO USE YOU! God wants you to influence people for him. But he can’t use us if we’re not prepared—not ready to be used. So, how do we ready ourselves? If you look to your notes (in the bulletin), you’ll see that today I’m introducing you to 3 steps to being ready to change the world: *So, let’s jump right into this. First...*

Be where God wants me to be. This is *the physical readiness*: Be physically where God wants you to be.

Have you ever had one of those experiences where you were ... at the right place at just the right time? And it was eerie ... how it worked out? I’d call that a God-incidence (instead of coincidence) ... and I believe that’s exactly what happened to Philip! When we’re sensitive to the Spirit of God in our lives, this is exactly what can happen...

You cannot influence someone for Jesus, you can’t talk about your faith, if you’re not in the right place. So, in our story, Philip was in the right place. God told him to go to the desert road (pretty specific), and God had him walk up to a carriage carrying an Ethiopian government official. He was obedient ... and ended up in the right place, at the right time, didn’t he?

But, I want you to get this part: *God does lead us where he wants us to be!* And let me say this: God has you in Lomira, or Brownsville, or Theresa, or Campbellsport, or Fond du Lac, or Waupun right now ... for a reason and a purpose—whether you were born and raised here or whether you’ve moved here for some other reason. God has you here for a reason! He has you in your job for a reason; he has you in your neighborhood for a reason; he has you at that gym for a reason; he has you hanging out with the friends you have for a reason; and yes, he has you *in that family* for a reason... What’s the reason? So you can be an influence on other people’s lives for Jesus. That’s why you’re there; that’s why God wants you there. So, #1, *be where God wants you to be.* Next, if you want to be ready to change the world, you’ve also got to be aware of this: Don’t just be *where*, but...

Be aware of who God wants me to invest in. I call this *spiritual readiness*—being aware of whose life God is working in around you...

You see, we have two types of friends in our life. We have those friends who don't want to talk about God. They don't want anything to do with God, and if you're ever in a conversation about God or about the Christian faith, it usually turns into an argument. And they seem a long ways from God.

But you also have another kind of friend in your life, and that's the friend who is more open to talking about spiritual things. This is someone who may be going through a tough time, who may be hurting, and who may be open to what you have to say about your faith. And the mistake we often make is ... we get so focused on the 'hard cases' that we miss the person who is sitting quietly in the corner, hurting, looking for something, and desperately needing God in their life...

Philip didn't miss his opportunity, did he? He heard the Ethiopian reading scripture out loud (how they do it) and realized he was open to God, so he was able to talk to him about Jesus. Let me ask you this: *Who are the people in your life who are most receptive to talking about faith?* I need you to know this...

There are 3 times in people's lives where they're most open/receptive to God:

- UNDER TENSION – When people are under stress/tension—at work, at home, when looking at finances, facing times of great anxiety, they're more open to the things of God...
- DURING TRANSITION – If folks are 'in transition,' they are more open to God—those who are moving, getting married (new relationships), having a new baby, or moving into a new job. This is when people are open to talk about God...
- IN TROUBLE – When people experience loss in life, they're more open to talking about God—about to lose a job, loss of a marriage, when finances are going bad; when they're in trouble, they're open to God...

The reason people are more open during these times is that they come to realize ... I CAN'T DO IT ALL ON MY OWN! They need God in their life; they need something more. So, once you're where God wants you to be, and know who God wants you to invest in, then this:

Be ready to share my faith at any time. This one we'll call *intellectual readiness*—when you are at the right place, you recognize the right person, and you know *intellectually* what to do and say. You see, Philip was ready, wasn't he? He was in the right place; he knew who God wanted him to talk to; and he was ready to speak a word of truth to this Ethiopian official; he knew what to say and how to share his faith...

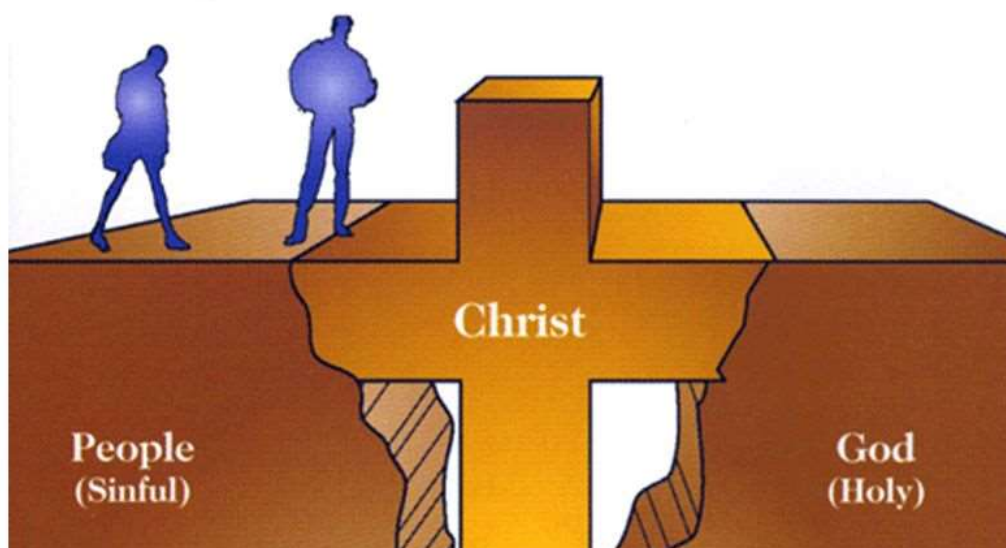
Let me ask you this: Would you be ready to talk about your faith were the opportunity to come up this week? Would you be ready? I want to spend the next few moments showing you how to be ready... So, here're 5 ways to be ready to change the world ... by sharing your faith. First...

My story. Now, I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this one, as we did a whole Sunday morning on 'My Story' a couple weeks back; the bulletin insert, with guidelines on how to prepare to tell your story, is still available through the office. *Please let Jessica know if you'd like a copy of the guide during the week.* Just remember, in a nutshell ... BC ... and AD. This is my life before Christ (BC) and this is my life after my decision to allow Jesus to be LORD of my life (AD). Next comes...

The Bridge. Here's the bridge illustration (which, by the way, you can get an app for your phone to help you share this too). See John 5:24...

Jesus Christ: the Bridge

God has provided the only way...
Each person must make a choice...



The next illustration is ... Do versus Done. This is probably the simplest illustration for sharing your faith [Idea = *Religion says DO; Jesus says DONE*]; see both Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 Peter 3:18 for this idea... Our next illustration for sharing your faith is...

The morality ladder (Rom. 3:22). This is the illustration you bring up when others say 'I don't need God', 'I don't need Jesus', or 'I'm a good person and don't believe a loving God would send a good person to hell,' etc.

Now, please don't confuse this with the 'stairway to Heaven.' It's a morality ladder ... and with that, we judge other people. Everyone we know—including ourselves—either consciously or subconsciously put people on the morality ladder. If they're a good person, we put them toward the top. If they're a bad person, we put them near the bottom. We judge them, don't we? And most people view eternity—getting into heaven—the same way. If you're too low on the ladder, you don't get into heaven. We judge people that way.

In fact, let me ask you some questions: Who do you have at the bottom of your ladder? What kinds of people do we think are the worst people in the world? Murderers. That's one. What else? Rapists? Robbers? We put these at the bottom of the ladder, don't we? We judge.

But on a brighter note, who are the people—you would say—are the best people in the world? You know, the Billy Grahams of the world—way above any local church pastor, I assure you. We'll put them at the very top of the morality ladder, won't we? Or where would you put them? And I'm sure there're some at the middle of the ladder too.

The truth is, about 80% of Americans think that because they're good people—good enough, in their estimation, they'll be headed to heaven for sure. But ... is that how it works? The truth is, if we are a human being ... *we're all on the bottom rung of the morality ladder, without Jesus!* How are we possibly going to cover the gap that is between you—as a human being—and the perfection God would demand if you had to earn your way into heaven? In Romans 3:22, the Apostle Paul lets us in on this truth: "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are." The truth is ... we're all on the same rung, aren't we? The same place ... in need of God's grace—the only way we'll spend eternity with him, the only way to make up for that gap between us... *Be ready to share your story in these ways, as well as this final one...*

My invitation. Now, I'm not going to get into this too much ... and give it away, as next week the whole message will be on this one; we're going to be looking a story from the Book of Matthew about a guy named Andrew, who invited his brother to meet Jesus. Today, let's close here: **Read this with me, would you?**

Colossians 4:5-6: "Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." In other words, BE READY. As my father would say, 'Be ready to preach, pray, or die on a moment's notice!' If we're ready, we can change the world ... eternally...