



Do you ever wonder, “Am I living the life I was meant to live?” That’s a big question with implications into every area of our lives. Maybe that’s too big of a question. Here’s what I mean more specifically.

Are you experiencing life to the full in your relationships?

Are you experiencing everything in life God designed you for professionally?

Are you experiencing the fullness of life physically?

How about emotionally? Are you as emotionally whole and healthy as you can be?

And in your spiritual life—are you living the life of fullness that Jesus describes in John 10?

I’ve answered “no” to all of these questions before.

If you answered no to any of these, you might say you feel stuck or plateaued or even dull. You might have been living like this for so long you are resigned to the conclusion that this is the new normal for you. You aren’t happy about it but you don’t know how to change it either.

In today’s sermon I’m going to show you how to get unstuck. Specifically, I’m going to show you how to get unstuck spiritually. Stated another way, in our verses today God is going to show us how to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. When we do that, we will be living a vibrant and thrilling spiritual life.

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”

“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?”

So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant (1 Kings 19:19–21).

“So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair” (v. 19a). What I see in this verse is the sovereign timing of God. Elisha was busy and actively working for

his family’s business when Elijah walked onto the field, stopped the plowing, and threw his cloak onto Elisha. Elisha didn’t wake up in the morning expecting this to happen. Instead, Elisha had plans and dreams of his own, like all of us. But on this day, Elisha encountered the sovereign timing of God.

This is the way it works with God. As the sovereign ruler of the universe, he decides the exact message to be delivered and the perfect timing to deliver it. Let’s acknowledge how different this is from human communication. If I have big news to deliver to Cassie, I have learned that surprising her is not a good idea. With our friends, family and co-workers, we usually have a slow roll-out of big news.

Before we got our dog, Charlie, there were dozens and dozens of conversations about how a dog would impact our lives over many months. This was the only way I could reasonably introduce a dog into our family.

I’ve wondered why God doesn’t do slow roll-outs of information with us. Why doesn’t he start hinting that a change is coming, then warm us up with a bit more information, then persuade us with the benefits?

You know why God doesn’t do it this way? Because we’d want to change his plans. We’d offer our suggestions to make His plan better. We’d offer our perspective that (that) is a bit too scary for me. So how about I meet you halfway?

No. Instead, as the Sovereign ruler of the universe, when God determines the time is right, He leads us. He speaks to us. He convicts us. His voice is inescapable. His truth penetrates our heart. We can try to outrun Him but we find He’s everywhere. His direction almost always scares us.

Here’s a universal experience of people who are wholeheartedly following Jesus: We think we know what our life is bringing next. We have plans; we have an emotional, psychological buy-in to a direction of life; and out of nowhere God speaks.

Are you willing and able to say, “I surrender” to the sovereign timing of God? You might or might not know of a specific message God has given you. Yet saying, “I surrender” is the first step toward a vibrant, thriving and thrilling spiritual life.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”

“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?” (verses 19b–20).

Picture this scene: Elijah has stopped the plowing, thrown his cloak over Elisha, then turned and started walking away. Then Elisha has to run after Elijah in order to talk to him.

Although God would be fully justified to dictate exactly what every person does, that isn't the way God chooses to interact with humanity. Instead He works by invitation, not compulsion.

As we think about Elisha's willingness to surrender to the timing of God, note that God's voice is accompanied by His presence.

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him (v. 19).

A wholehearted follower of Jesus will know and experience God's Spirit. I think it's possible that Elisha felt the presence of God's Spirit when the cloak fell on him because Elijah's cloak seems to have God's Spirit upon it. *“Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground”* (2 Kings 2:8). *“Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it ... it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over”* (2 Kings 2:13-14).

Whether Elisha felt the Spirit of God because the cloak was draped across his shoulders or because God spoke quietly to his heart, Elisha was confident that God was calling him to follow Elijah. He was willing to surrender to God's sovereign timing. He was saying “yes” to God's invitation. And Elisha's actions described in verse 21 show unwavering devotion to God.

So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant (v. 21).

Elisha went to the items that brought him financial security and job security—his two oxen and the yoke. He slaughtered the oxen, cut up the yoke, burned the wood, cooked the oxen meat over the fire, and fed his family and friends.

I was thinking of this kind of wholehearted, unwavering devotion on Friday morning. Allie and I were playing soccer against a herd of 1st graders on the school playground, while we waited for the school bell to start the day.

I'd hold the ball under my foot and they'd rush up full speed attempting to kick the ball out. I'd roll the ball to the left just before they got there and their speed would carry them way past the ball. They'd regroup and rush full speed again to the ball.

Just before they got there, I'd roll the ball the right. And again their speed would carry them way past the ball. I felt like a soccer star. I was tricking them, showing them the ball—the object they wanted—then moving it away just before they got there.

As they grow older, they will learn to hold back. They'll learn to hedge their commitments. They'll become more sophisticated in their reasoning and measured in their responses. They'll learn that going for anything with wholehearted, unwavering devotion can make you look foolish; can break your heart; can bankrupt you. But it's the only way to follow Jesus.

“Most people fail at whatever they attempt because of an undecided heart. Should I? Should I not? Go forward? Go back? Success requires the emotional balance of a committed heart. When confronted with a challenge, the committed heart will search for a solution. The undecided heart searches for an escape. A committed heart does not wait for conditions to be exactly right. Why? Because conditions are never exactly right. Indecision limits the Almighty and His ability to perform miracles in your life. He has put the vision in you—proceed! To wait, to wonder, to doubt, to be indecisive is to disobey God.” (Andy Andrews, *The Traveler's Gift*)

First—surrender to the sovereign timing of God.

Second—know and experience God's Spirit.

Third—have an attitude of unwavering devotion.

These are the three attributes these verses teach us about being a follower of God. If you aren't experiencing a spiritual life that is full and vibrant and thrilling, these three attributes will point you in the direction of experiencing it.

Maybe today is a day God is speaking to you. You didn't anticipate it, but that's how God's timing works. And as I've been speaking you've heard God's voice and he's pointed out some way you're holding back, or some way He wants to change you, or some way he wants to use you, or some way you will say to him the hundredth time, “yes” I surrender (this) to you wholeheartedly.

I would expect that God is speaking to many of you and His invitation is clear. Let me remind you of what Jesus said, *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27). If you are hearing God speak to you today, you can know with confidence that you are his child, you can trust him with absolute confidence and trust that the best life you desire spiritually will come as you surrender everything to him.

There is one more sentence in our verses today that we need to cover. This verse describes what's waiting on the other side of surrendering.

“Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant” (v. 21).

What's waiting on the other side of surrender? The role of servanthood. Elisha will become a powerful prophet of God who

performs amazing miracles. But before he is used in such a way, he will be humbled and formed by the mantle of servanthood. *"Elisha ... he used to pour water on the hands of Elijah"* (2 Kings 3:11).

This is what awaits every one of us, too, on the other side of surrender. *"Jesus said to his disciples, '... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all' "* (Mark 10:43-44).

When you surrender to following Jesus, you put on the slave's apron.

In his classic book, *Spiritual Leadership*, Oswald Sanders says, "It is noteworthy that only once did Jesus say that He was leaving His disciples an example, and that was when He washed their feet (John 13:15) – an example of servanthood. And only once did any other writer say that He had left an example – and that was an example of suffering (1 Peter 2:21). Thus the thoughts of suffering and servanthood are linked, even as they were in the life of the Lord. And is the servant greater than his Lord?"

So the invitation from God is to follow Him without holding anything back and a hint of what's in store for you is servanthood. And as strange and unlikely it is that anyone would willingly choose such a path, this is what a disciple of Christ says "yes" to when God calls them.

Maybe you are hesitant to follow Jesus. If you are unsure of your worthiness, you are in good company. Everyone who has bowed their knee before Jesus feels unworthy because He is holy and we are not. If you are hesitant to lead others and disciple others, take heart.

"If it were a path filled with ease, worldly fame, prestige, power or comfort, we would choose it of our own accord. And subsequently feel very proud of ourselves for being wise enough to choose it."

"True greatness, true leadership, is achieved not by reducing men to one's service but in giving oneself in selfless service to them. And that is never done without cost. It involves drinking a bitter cup and experiencing a painful baptism of suffering. The true spiritual leader is concerned infinitely more with the service he can render God and his fellowmen than with the benefits and pleasures he can extract from life. He aims to put more into life than he takes out of it." (Oswald Sanders)

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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