

God Building His Kingdom  
July 22, 2018

Do you have any personal stories that bring back feelings of both joy and sadness? I want to share with you one of mine. It was a Saturday afternoon. Jimmy Greene called me on the phone. And I thought to myself, "What is he calling me for? I don't want to talk with him!"

Jimmy was a nice kid. But you know how you think of yourself as being better than certain other people because they are, in your opinion, not as good looking or as smart as you, or they are more awkward than you? That's how I felt about Jimmy. We had known each other since fifth grade when we were in the same class. That Saturday he called me we were in the eighth grade.

We were not friends, not at home nor at school. He did not live close to me though we were in the same community. And we did not have any classes together in the eighth grade. So we did not socialize at school.

He had never called me before, nor I him. I don't remember why he called. I don't remember what we talked about.

Even though I wasn't glad he called, I didn't cut the call short. I was polite, and we talked for about an hour. I look back on that conversation with sadness because of my attitude towards Jimmy. In a few moments I'll tell you the rest of the story, the part with the joy.

Stories catch our interest. I learn more information in story form than I do from a presentation of cold, hard facts. I took five history courses in college and only enjoyed one of them. That one was taught by Dr. Terry, who told history more like a story.

Ken Blanchard writes stories. Ken has written a number of books on leadership. You may have heard of his best selling book, The One Minute Manager. In this book, which was written as a story, a businessman in middle management is having problems in his job. Then he meets the a very successful business manager. They have a series of conversations and the successful man, the one minute manager, teaches the other man what has made him successful. The main character puts to use in his own situation what he learns and turns things around in his job. Blanchard's books are fairly short, and not technical at all.

Jesus taught using a form of stories called a parable. Parables are short and good for making a point.

Some stories, like parables are fiction and others are true, like my story of Jimmy Greene. The Bible is full of such true stories.

One such story is our passage this morning in Luke 1:26.

**Luke 1:26-38 (NIV) In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."**

**Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name**

**Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."**

**"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"**

**The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."**

**"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.**

As we get ready to serve with Jesus at Vacation Bible school this week, we need to know the lessons of this story. Lesson number one...

### **1. God most often uses ordinary people to build His kingdom.**

Mary was just an ordinary young woman. There is no hint in the text to suggest there was anything special about her. She was not smarter, healthier, better educated, or more personable than any other young, Jewish woman of the time.

The text says she was a virgin, engaged to be married, and living in Nazareth. There was nothing special about being a virgin, engaged to be married. There were probably several hundred young women just like her at any one time in Galilee.

Nor was the fact that she was from Nazareth anything special. Nazareth was a very small village, way out in the country. Today we would say it was in the boonies. It was not on a main road. It wasn't a place you went to unless you were planning to go there, or you were lost. You didn't go through Nazareth on your way to anyplace else.

It was the kind of place that people thought little of, even made fun of. About thirty years after this, when a man named Philip met Jesus, he ran to tell his brother Nathaniel. He said, "We have found the messiah, Jesus of Nazareth." And Nathaniel answers, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

So there is nothing special about Mary. She was not extraordinary in any way. She is just an average person.

She was just like all of us. No one here, that I know of, is special. No one here stands out from the crowd. We have some who are engineers, teachers, managers, work with computers, work in a medical field, or other types of jobs. And many of you, I'm sure, are good at what you do. But I don't know of any of us here who are extraordinary at what we do.

Many of us have hobbies and interests that we work at, even with some skill. But there are no geniuses or super-talented persons among us. We're ordinary, average people. Yet, we are the kind of people God most often uses to grow His kingdom.

The Bible is full of ordinary people that God used to build His kingdom. People like Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Deborah, Hannah, Samuel, Peter, and Barnabas. They were no different than most of the people of their day. They weren't better looking, more talented, richer, or nicer than others. They were just ordinary, average people. Among them were shepherds, farmers, fishermen, and housewives. God most often uses ordinary people to build His kingdom. So we should expect God to use us this week at Vacation Bible School.

## **2. God works His power through those He uses.**

Mary did not understand how she could be pregnant. She wasn't even fully married yet. She couldn't be pregnant. If she wasn't pregnant, how could she have a child that would be marked from birth by God?

The answer, of course, is that God would do this by His power. He is not limited by Mary's marital status.

**Luke 1:34 (NIV) The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."**

The angel then illustrates this power by informing Mary that her aged relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a baby and was already six months pregnant.

Nothing is impossible for God. God can do anything. If God created the universe out of nothing, he can certainly create a baby without the sperm and seed of a man and woman. Such an act would be a very minor miracle to the creator of the whole world. God can do anything outside of what we consider to be normal or outside of the laws of nature.

As we look at our VBS tasks this week, the work isn't that hard. Presenting the facts of Jesus is not hard. But getting those facts from the head into the heart, that is impossible for us. Only God can do that. Only God can plant the spiritual truths we present into the hearts of the children.

And while not all of us will be teaching, all of us will be loving the children, smiling at them, accepting of them, and trying to connect with them. It will take effort. It will take humility. It will take love. Some of these children will be hard to work with. Yet, we want each child to feel our love of him or her. But only God can make them feel cared about. Only God move them to be thankful and give thanks.

We have a part to play this week, but it is God who must do the things we cannot do. And nothing is impossible for God. So...

**Believe God can work through you.**

**Pray for God to work through you.**

**Expect that God will change lives through us.**

## **3. When God works through us, give Him the credit (glory) for the results.**

A couple of decades ago there was a pretzel commercial on TV. A hockey game is going on and the goalie of one team is injured and carried from the ice. Looking for someone to fill in the coach calls for a spectator from the stands, a guy eating pretzels. He is just a normal guy, a little shorter than average, a bit overweight, losing his hair. He comes down and without even wearing any safety equipment except a glove does an amazing job as goalie. And everyone starts saying, "It must be the pretzels."

The idea was that this guy couldn't do this stuff on his own. It must be something else at work in him. It must be the pretzels.

We want God to be present in us and through us this week at VBS. We want people to say, "Wow, something wonderful is happening at that church. It must be God."

And when God works through us we must praise him in our hearts and our prayers, giving him the credit for the results.

**4. God works most through those who are willing to be used.** Mary said...

**Luke 1:38 (NIV) "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."**

Are you willing to be used by God? Are you willing to love others with the love of Jesus? Are you willing to tell them about Jesus if you get the opportunity? Expect to be used by God this next week. Pray expectant prayers of what God will do through you.

We want our memories of this next week to be all positive, all joy, and no sadness. And that brings me back to Jimmy Greene. One day, in my college years, Jimmy Greene called me again. I had not seen him since the ninth grade. He was now married to a woman whose friend was in my Bible Study group at church. That is how he got my phone number. He called this time to tell me something special.

Jimmy called to tell me that he was a Christian. And he became a Christian because in the course of that other phone call years before, I told him about Jesus. I don't remember what we talked about in that conversation. I don't remember telling him about Jesus. But evidently, I did.

So now I look back on that first phone call with mixed feelings. I feel sad that I did not care about Jimmy. And I feel glad, that God used me anyway to bring Jimmy to Jesus. God increased his kingdom by one person through ordinary me. That is so cool.

At VBS this week, or wherever you who are not helping in VBS will be, you may encounter someone on the phone or in person. Even if you were not expecting it or inviting it, God set it up. God set up this meeting between the two of you. He has planned for you to receive this person well, like Jesus would. And in conversation you may have an opportunity to tell that person about Jesus.

Today, let's pray ourselves into the hands of God to be used this week to build His kingdom.

Lord, I believe you want to use this Vacation Bible School to build your kingdom.

I believe you work through ordinary people, like me.

I am willing to be used.

I ask that you change the lives of the children, their siblings, and their parents through our work.

Remind me each day this week how to pray for this VBS.