

“Somebody’s Knocking at Your Door”

For David, after serving God’s purpose in his own generation, fell asleep (Acts 13:36).

Responsive Reading, “Somebody’s Knockin’ at Your Door”¹

On Thursday, November 9, 1989, David Erickson called his best friend, Kirk Nowery, and said, “Kirk, I want you to go somewhere with me today.”

Knowing his friend all too well, Kirk was hesitant: “Where do you want to go?”

“To Germany,” David answered, as easily as if he had said “To the mall.”

“Germany!” Kirk said. “Why in the world do you want to go to Germany? And why do we have to do it *today*?”

“We have to go today,” David answered, “because they’re tearing down the Berlin Wall, and we have to see it. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. There’s only one Berlin Wall, and once it’s down, it’s down.”

Kirk said, “No, I’m not going”; but he later wrote, “I chose the path most traveled and turned down the opportunity. I chose to do the expected thing rather than the extraordinary thing, and I’ve regretted it ever since.”

Three years later, David called again: “Kirk, I want you to go somewhere with me,” and Kirk’s answer was, “When are we leaving?” Here’s how Kirk described what happened next . . .

“Our destination turned out to be Albania, a small nation in southeastern Europe, bordered by Greece, Yugoslavia, and Macedonia. Albania had been ruthlessly ruled by communists since 1944, and had been proclaimed the world’s first completely atheist nation in 1987. But now, in 1992, the USSR was disintegrating and westerners were being allowed in for the first time. Albania had been so isolated that no one knew what was happening there, and we were about to find out.

“Walking into Albania’s capital city, Tirana, was like stepping back in time. It looked like the faded image from a World War II history book. Nearly all the vehicles were from the 1940s and the city was drab and lifeless. After getting a room in Tirana’s only hotel, we began to explore the city. We were attracted to a great crowd surrounding some sort of compound, and when we came nearer, we saw that people were handing children over the stone wall surrounding the property.

“The police didn’t challenge our entry, and once inside those walls we saw a sea of children and realized that this was why God sent us here. We knew this was an opportunity from Him.

“We were ushered to the main building where nurses greeted us with tears streaming down their faces. They spoke to us excitedly and urgently in their own language. Following a group of nurses, we were shown one dimly-lit room after another, and in each one we saw children from wall to wall. Hundreds of precious children stared up at us, their dark eyes seeming to plead with us for attention.

“The nurses were crying and talking very rapidly, and our interpreter was doing her best to translate as quickly as possible. ‘We need help . . . please help us . . . we have been waiting for you to come . . . thank God you are here!’

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on January 28, 2018.

“What in the world were we to do? We were just two pastors from South Florida. How could we respond to something so overwhelming? We went back to our hotel in shock. We hadn’t been there long when the ancient phone rang in the lobby, and we were told that a car was being sent to take us to meet the new President of Albania.

“After traveling through the city with a full police escort, we were greeted by President Sali Berisha and many officials. The President wanted to know why we had come to his country. While I was thinking about an answer, my friend David quickly said, ‘We represent World Hope, and we’re here to help the children.’ ‘World Hope,’ I thought, ‘what is World Hope? There’s nobody in this but the two of us!’

“The President was thrilled, and within a couple of days David and I had been given responsibility for the orphanage in Tirana as well as for orphanages in four other cities. We put up a sign in the hotel lobby that said, “WORLD HOPE, Room 112 - Changing the World One Child at a Time.”² And today, twenty-six years later, Hope Partners International is still doing just that.³

I remembered this story last August, when, after church was over, Earl Sasser walked into my office to say, “Dave, you and I should get in the car and drive all night to see tomorrow’s total eclipse.” Normally, I would have said, “Thanks, Earl, but I’ve got stuff to do.” But as I remembered Kirk’s story, I said, “Earl, let’s do it.”

Now the fact of the matter is that after several hours of pondering and preparation, Earl and I decided to watch the eclipse via the NASA website instead. But I was still pretty impressed that Earl would make such a proposal, and that I had agreed to it.

These stories also remind me of a famous “knock at the door” that takes place early in J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic novel, *The Hobbit*.⁴ At the beginning of the story, a little Hobbit named Bilbo Baggins enjoys a comfortable and predictable life in his home in the Shire. On a particularly fine morning, the wizard, Gandalf, drops in for a surprise visit, and after a brief and pleasant conversation, Gandalf turns to Bilbo and says, “I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it’s very difficult to find anyone.”

Bilbo, who does not yet realize that this is Gandalf, replies, “I should think so—in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can’t think what anybody sees in them.”

Bilbo starts looking through his mail, hoping that the old man will leave. But Gandalf continues leaning on his staff, gazing at Bilbo until Bilbo angrily exclaims, “Good morning! We don’t want any adventures here, thank you! You might try over The Hill or across The Water,” by which he meant that the conversation was at an end.

When Gandalf reveals his true identity, Bilbo gasps, “Gandalf, Gandalf! Good gracious me! Not the wandering wizard who used to tell such wonderful tales at parties, about dragons and goblins and giants and the rescue of princesses? Not the Gandalf who was responsible for so many quiet lads and lasses going off into the Blue for mad adventures? Bless me . . . you used

² Kirk Nowery, *The Stewardship of Life: Making the Most of All that You Have and All that You Are* (Camarillo, CA: Spire Resources, 2004), pp. 93-99. .

³ <http://www.hopepartners.com/kirk.php>

⁴ *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, New Line Cinema, 2012, directed by Peter Jackson. Based on J. R. R. Tolkien’s 1937 book, *The Hobbit: or There and Back Again*.

to upset things badly in these parts once upon a time. I beg your pardon, but I had no idea you were still in business.”

Gandalf replies, “It is I, and I will give you what you asked for.”

Bilbo objects, “I beg your pardon, I haven’t asked for anything!”

Gandalf says, “Yes, you have! Twice now. My pardon. I give it you. In fact I will go so far as to send you on this adventure. Very amusing for me, very good for you and profitable too, very likely, if you ever get over it.”

And *that* encounter reminds me of some other familiar ones we’ve considered already this morning:

- *The LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).*
- The very next day after Rebekah first met Abraham’s servant who had come from hundreds of miles away, her family called her and asked, “*Will you go with this man?*” And she responded, “*I will go*” (Genesis 24:58).
- After Isaiah’s overwhelming vision of God in the Temple, God asked, “*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*” And Isaiah answered, “*Here am I. Send me!*” (Isaiah 6:8).
- *The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me” (Jonah 1:1-2).*
- When Paul encountered the radiant glory of the Risen Christ on his way to Damascus, he asked, “*Who are you, Lord?*” And the answer came, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do*” (Acts 9:5-6).

Now while you and I may or may not receive such commissions as these, there’s no guarantee that we won’t. And so long as we follow Bilbo’s idea of insisting on staying close to home and on being home for supper, we’ll not have many adventures.

How would human history have been different if Abram had said, “NO.” Or Rebekah? Or Isaiah? Or Paul? Or Martin Luther King, Jr.? What would be different, right now, right here, if Dr. King had said, “NO”? Can you even imagine it?

The Bible tells us that David accomplished “God’s purpose in his own generation” (Acts 13:36). You and I may or may not be called to change the course of human history, but there are in fact things that God has prepared for YOU to do (Ephesians 2:10). And if you’re still breathing, you haven’t finished with them yet.

It doesn’t matter how old or young you might be. Samuel was just a boy when God began to use him to change the nation of Israel. Moses was 80 when he finally got started on that purpose for which he had been born. No matter where you are on life’s journey, it is still the case that God intends for your life to count for God’s Kingdom all the way to the finish line.

While you may or may not know in this moment all that God’s larger plan for your life entails, you do know quite a few things that you need to be doing in order to be ready when that knock on the door comes. The essential preparation comes before the knock. Soldiers don’t wait until war is declared before they begin getting into shape and learning how to use their equipment. This is, for example, why we often talk about “The Five Things Disciples Do Every Week”:

1. **WORSHIP** We covenant together to ***participate*** in at least one corporate worship service every week.
2. **CONNECT** We covenant together to ***participate*** in at least one face-to-face spiritual accountability and study group every week.
3. **GROW** We covenant together to ***practice*** daily personal time in prayer and in the Word as well as the regular discipline of stewardship of our resources.
4. **SERVE** We covenant together to ***use*** our gifts and abilities to build up the Body of Christ in at least one way every week.
5. **GO** We covenant together to ***live*** in the world in such a way that we engage in some sort of Great Commandment or Great Commission activity every week.

My friend, if you're not doing those five things, you're not going to be ready when the knock comes; but more than anything else, being ready to say "YES!" involves living every day in a personal love relationship with God. **God is a lot more interested in a love relationship with you than in what you might be able to do for the Kingdom.**

The truth of the matter is that if you do not have an intimate and personal relationship of love with God the Father through Jesus of Nazareth in the power of God's Spirit, nothing else in your life is going to make much sense. But once you discover such a relationship and become convinced from your head to your toes *that God really does love you* with an unimaginably fierce and holy love, *then* you begin to be ready to know and do God's will.

Now if you're listening to all this and are feeling anxious about "the knock on the door," it's crucial to remember that *we need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly* [because] *his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us* (1 John 4:18).

So if you're not yet at the place where you are fully and completely convinced that God loves you and is fully trustworthy, then that's where you need to begin. You probably know that today's spiritual grows out of Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says, "*See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*"

That statement is in fact an invitation to an adventure like nothing else on the planet; but before it is an invitation to *adventure*, this is an invitation to *friendship* (John 14-17).

Somebody's knockin' at your door,
Somebody's knockin' at your door;
O sinner, why don't you answer?
Somebody's knockin' at your door.

Knocks like Jesus,
Somebody's knockin' at your door.

Can't you hear Him?
Somebody's knockin' at your door.

Can't you trust Him?
Somebody's knockin' at your door.

Jesus calls you!
Somebody's knockin' at your door.

Answer Jesus!
Somebody's knockin' at your door.

My friend, David chose to accomplish God's purposes in his generation.

What will you choose?

#598 Wherever He Leads, I'll Go

Somebody's Knockin' at Your Door

Leader: *The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Get up! Go the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because their evil has come up before me."*
[And] **Jonah got up to flee** to Tarshish from the LORD's presence
(Jonah 1:1-3a).

People: **The LORD said to Abram: "Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. . . ."**
So Abram went (Genesis 12:1-4a).

Leader: *"Before I had finished praying silently, there was Rebekah coming with her jug on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. . . . Then I knelt low, worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who guided me on the right way to take the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. . . . [So] do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey a success. Send me away so that I may go to my master"*
(Genesis 24:45, 48, 56).

People: **So they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her opinion."**
They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?"
She replied, "I will go." (Genesis 24:57-58).

Leader: *As he passed alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.*
"Follow me," Jesus told them, "and I will make you fish for people."
Immediately they left their nets and followed him
(Mark 1:16-18).

People: **For David, after serving God's purpose in his own generation, fell asleep [and] was buried with his fathers** (Acts 13:36).

Leader: The Word of God for the People of God.

People: **Thanks be to God!**