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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250

These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *Fear Not: Finding Courage to Be Who God Wants You to Be* by Ed Love (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2014).

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Ed Love's book, *Fear Not*, forms the basis of this ten-week sermon series. Written in a conversational style, *Fear Not* uses biblical truth, inspiration, and practical application to address ten of our most common fears. These notes will help you craft an engaging sermon series that will help congregation member discover how they can replace fear with resolute faith.



introduction

Who would have thought God would use an eighty-year-old stammering shepherd to rescue more than two million enslaved Hebrews from the grip of mighty Pharaoh? Or who would have supposed he would choose a shepherd boy to slay the giant, who had intimidated Israel's army. Or who would have thought he would use Esther, a defenseless Jewish girl, to save his people from extinction? But his ways are inscrutable and always perfect.

In Luke 1:8–23 and 1:57–66, we read about an obscure married couple God used to introduce Jesus' forerunner to the world.

sermon outline

- I. God Uses Unlikely People to Fulfill His Astounding Ways
 - A. Zechariah, an Elderly Priest (Luke 1:8–18)
 - B. Elizabeth, Zechariah's Elderly Wife (Luke 1:13, 36–37, 57)
- II. God Plans a Remarkable Future
 - A. A Supernatural Birth (Luke 1:13)
 - B. A Nation's Spiritual Rebirth (Luke 1:14–17)
- III. God Keeps His Word
 - A. John, the Forerunner of the Messiah, Was Born (Luke 1:19–20)
 - B. Zechariah Could Speak Again (Luke 1:57–66)

conclusion

Regardless how big God's plan seems, we ought to be available to fit into his plan, believe his promises, and anticipate their fulfillment. God's next big idea may reach you soon. It may seem impossible, but be ready for him to do the impossible in and through you!

2

God's amazing adequacy

Luke 1:26–38

introduction

Someone has observed that an excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. We all make excuses, don't we? We excuse ourselves from teaching Sunday school because we say we don't know the Bible well enough or our public speaking skills are virtually nonexistent. We say we can't share the gospel because we are shy. The excuses mount up until God knocks them down with the assurance that with him all things are possible (Matt. 19:26).

sermon outline

I. Mary's Concern (Luke 1:27–34)

The same angel that appeared to Zechariah with astonishing news appeared to Mary, an espoused virgin, when Zechariah's wife Elizabeth was six months pregnant. His announcement to Mary was also astonishing. He told her the Lord highly favored her and was with her (Luke 1:28). But the astonishing news followed: Mary would become pregnant and give birth to a son. She was instructed to name the child Jesus, meaning Savior.

In *Fear Not*, Ed Love wisely notes: "If there was anybody who had a human reason to feel inadequate, it would have been Mary. Here God's messenger revealed to her how God wanted to usher in his plan of salvation for all humanity through her body" (p. 42).

A. She Was Frightened (Luke 1:29)

Seeing an angel was not an everyday experience. Mary wondered what the angel's greeting meant.

B. She Was a Virgin (Luke 1:27, 34)

She was puzzled. How could she, a virgin, become pregnant? She might have been concerned, too, about the social implications of her pregnancy. How would her fiancée Joseph react? What sneers and jeers would she endure in public? How would her parents react?

Has God called you to serve him in a way others might not understand? Are you concerned about what others might say or do? Do you think what God is asking you to do is impossible?

II. God's Capability (Luke 1:31–37)

A. Mary's Baby Would Be Savior and King (Luke 1:31–33)

God is capable of amazing things. The baby born to the virgin, peasant girl Mary would redeem and reign. His kingdom would never end.

B. Mary's Pregnancy Would Result from God's Omnipotent Intervention (Luke 1:34–35)

The Holy Spirit would overshadow Mary, and the conception would be immaculate. Therefore, the baby Jesus would not have a sin nature (see 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19).

C. Mary's Cousin Elizabeth Was Pregnant (Luke 1:36–37)

Elizabeth's impossible pregnancy would assure Mary that nothing is impossible with God.

III. Mary's Consecration (Luke 1:38)

A. She Saw Herself as the Lord's Servant

The word *servant* in verse 38 is the same word for *slave*.

B. She Was Committed to the Lord's Will

She told the angel, "May your word to me be fulfilled." Mary would fully obey the Lord.

conclusion

A fleet of delivery trucks displays the following motto on each truck: "Any Load, Any Time, Anywhere!" This is a good motto for every Christian to display on his or her heart when the Lord calls him or her to serve him. His adequacy always displaces our inadequacy.

3

share God's good news

Luke 2:8–20

introduction

The shepherds near Bethlehem were likely lonely and poor, and tasked with tending sheep destined for sacrifice. They were probably accustomed to bad news: a lamb born with defects, a predator nearby, a stray sheep, and another with a broken leg. So they must have been expected unusually bad news to hit home when an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the night sky blazed with intense light (Luke 2:8–9). However the angel was God's messenger of good news—unprecedented good news.

sermon outline

- I. The Nature of the Good News (Luke 2:10–14)
 - A. It Is a Source of Great Joy for All People (Luke 2:10)

None of us like to be a bearer of bad news, but we have received good news about salvation. We should gladly share it everywhere.
 - B. It Is Personal (Luke 2:11)

The angel told the shepherds that the Savior had been born “to you.” God gave his Son for each of us (John 3:16).
 - C. It Glorifies God (Luke 2:13–14)

Angels glorify God for giving his Son to save us.
- II. The Proper Response to the Good News (Luke 2:15–16)
 - A. The Shepherds Decided to Go to the Savior (Luke 2:15)

Life's most important decision is to come to Jesus.
 - B. The Shepherds Hurried to See the Savior (Luke 2:16)

No one should procrastinate about the need to come to Jesus (2 Cor. 6:1–2).
- III. The Distribution of the Good News (Luke 2:17, 20)
 - A. The Shepherds Spread the Word about Christ (Luke 2:17)

Our gospel message concerns God's Son. We must not lay aside the gospel of Christ and replace it with any other message.

B. The Shepherds Praised and Glorified God because of the Good News (Luke 2:20)

Life is too short to praise God adequately for the gift of his Son, but we can continue to praise him throughout eternity.

conclusion

Bad news engulfs the world, but we have good news to share with our neighbors, friends, coworkers, and others. Many are waiting for this good news. Let's not delay in presenting it to them.

4

the perfect fishing guide

Luke 5:1–11

introduction

Some fishermen take their sport very seriously. They fish not only nearby, but at faraway places. Some take trips to hard-to-reach regions, where they hire a guide to lead them to “secret” spots. Without the services of the guide, they would likely encounter frustration but no fish.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John were experienced fishermen who had been fishing close to home when Jesus met them one morning. At the time, they had given up. They had fished all night without catching anything. Now they were washing their nets. Although Jesus was teaching a crowd, he took time to guide the four disciples’ fishing expedition. His guidance changed their experience from failure to unprecedented success.

sermon outline

I. A Complete Disaster (Luke 5:1–5)

Peter had received an earlier call to follow Jesus, but it was temporary (John 1:40–42).

A. Fishing Instead of Following (Luke 5:1–3)

What must have gone through Peter’s mind when Jesus appeared on the shore and was teaching a crowd? Did he feel that he had let down Jesus by not following him? Why was he fishing and not following?

However, at Jesus’ request, he used his boat to row Jesus away from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the people.

B. Failure Instead of Success (Luke 5:4–5)

After teaching the people, Jesus directed Peter to enter deep water and lower the nets for a catch. But Peter objected. He told Jesus he and his partners had fished all night without catching anything. Reluctantly, though, he would do what Jesus said. By this time, Peter must have been fully convinced he had let down Jesus. Instead of obeying him promptly, he voiced an objection. He may have wondered how a carpenter could guide experienced fishermen to catch fish.

II. A Colossal Difference (Luke 5:6–7)

A. Suddenly Fish Filled the Nets (Luke 5:6)

Jesus had guided the fishermen to the fish. How did he know where they were? Was it because he was the Creator?

B. Suddenly Fish Filled Both Boats (Luke 5:7)

III. A Call to Discipleship (Luke 5:8–11)

A. Peter's Confession (Luke 5:8–9)

Astonished by the sudden catch of fish, Peter was deeply impressed with Jesus' authority. He fell at Jesus' feet, and urged him to depart from him, because Peter recognized his own sinfulness.

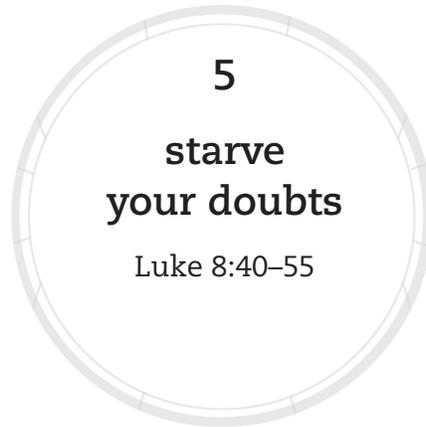
B. Jesus' Call (Luke 5:10–11)

Jesus is not only the perfect guide, but also the perfect restorer of those who let him down and then confess their sin. He told Peter not to fear. From that point on, Peter would catch people.

The fishermen pulled their boats to shore, left behind what must have been the most fish they had ever caught (a sizable potential profit), and followed Jesus.

conclusion

We may feel we have let down Jesus. Perhaps we have worked hard to win people to the Lord without success. But Jesus is the perfect guide to where the fish are. We may need to commit our fishing efforts more fully to him. We may find a great catch when he guides the expedition.



introduction

Can you remember the advice about reducing a fever and cold? Is it, “Feed a fever and starve a cold,” or is it, “Starve a fever, and feed a cold?” Undoubtedly, many people confuse the two parts of the advice, and that’s not good when they have a high temperature or a bad cold.

When it comes to faith, though, we can say confidently, “Feed your faith, and starve your doubts.” We all have doubts occasionally, but we would have fewer doubts if we fed our faith.

After Jesus returned from the region of the Gerasenes, a crowd welcomed him (Luke 8:40), but two people in particular captured his attention. Both reached out to him in faith.

sermon outline

I. Faith Reaches Out to Jesus (Luke 8:41–47)

A. A Father’s Desperate Request (Luke 8:41–42)

Jairus, a ruler of a synagogue, was desperate. Although many religious officials opposed Jesus, Jairus pinned his hope on Jesus to heal his twelve-year-old dying daughter. So he urged Jesus to come to his house.

B. A Woman’s Bold Action (Luke 8:43–47)

While Jesus accompanied Jairus to his home, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years reached out from behind Jesus and touched the hem of his garment. She believed he could heal her, and she was right. Jesus was aware of her touch of faith, and when she admitted that she had touched him, he commended her faith and sent her away in peace.

Jesus always knows when one of us reaches out to him in faith. It doesn’t matter whether we are surrounded by a crowd or alone, he recognizes and responds to our faith. Hebrews 4:14–16 affirms this truth.

II. Jesus Rewards Faith (Luke 8:48–55)

A. In Spite of the Circumstances (Luke 8:49–50)

Immediately after Jesus had sent the healed woman on her way, a messenger from Jairus’s home brought word that Jairus’s daughter had died. But Jesus told Jairus not to be afraid but to believe. “She will be healed,” he promised.

Negative circumstances may threaten our faith, but Jesus is greater than the circumstances. He wants us to look above the circumstances by faith and see him.

B. In spite of the Critics (Luke 8:51–55)

Mourners had gathered at Jairus's home, but Jesus told them to stop wailing because the girl was not dead but sleeping. His remark was met with laughter. Nevertheless, Jesus took the girl by the hand and commanded her to get up. The girl stood up. Jesus then instructed the onlookers to give her something to eat.

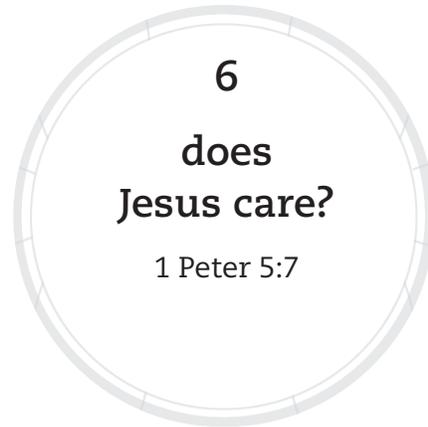
Many today laugh at our faith, but we must keep believing in spite of what the critics say. In *Fear Not*, Ed Love comments: "Jairus is a splendid example of a man who had a choice to believe or not believe. Jairus overcame his fears and chose to believe. When all hope seemed lost—he chose to believe. When the path of healing didn't make sense—he chose to believe. And when everyone else had given up—he chose to believe" (p. 80).

May we, too, choose to believe—always!

conclusion

A woman who lived beside the sea grew tired of looking out her bedroom window only to see a hill blocking her view. After reading in the Bible that faith as small as a mustard seed could move a mountain from one location to another (Matt. 17:20), she prayed at bedtime that God would cast her hill into the sea. The next morning, she looked out the bedroom window and saw the hill was still blocking her view. "I thought so," she said despondently. Her doubt had exceeded her faith, and her request was totally selfish.

God will always reward our faith (Heb. 11:5) if we pray according to his will. But we must trust and not doubt.



introduction

When an ostrich feels stressed, it may stick its head in the sand. When an unbeliever feels stressed, he may stick his head in a bottle of booze. When a Christian feels stressed, she may follow the advice: “When in trouble, when in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout.”

But there is a better way to handle stress, as the apostle Peter points out in 1 Peter 1:7.

sermon outline

I. Peter’s Exhortation (1 Pet. 5:7)

Peter instructed us to cast all our anxiety on Jesus. The word *all* suggests we should not retain any anxiety, whether large or small. We have a choice: We can worry or release our worry by turning our anxiety over to Jesus.

II. Peter’s Explanation (1 Pet. 5:7)

We should cast all our care on Jesus because he cares for us. When Israel’s high priest ministered in the Holy Place, he wore a breastplate on which were inscribed the names of the tribes of Israel. He also wore two shoulder plates on which were engraved the names of the tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:9–30). Today, Jesus, our Great High Priest, bears us on his shoulders and heart as he stands in the presence of God.

III. Peter’s Personal Experiences

Peter knew by personal experience that Jesus cares. Here are just two of those experiences.

A. When He Began to Sink in the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:25–32)

At Jesus’ bidding, Peter walked on the water toward Jesus, but when he saw the wind, he feared and began to sink. “Lord, save me,” he cried. Jesus caught him, questioned his doubt, and helped him into the boat. We, too, panic when we take our eyes off Jesus and fear the circumstances. But Jesus cares for us, as he did for Peter.

B. When He Was in Prison (Acts 12)

Herod had thrown Peter into prison with the intention of executing him as he executed James, the brother of John. However, the night before Peter’s trial, Peter was sleeping soundly while chained to two soldiers. Two more soldiers guarded the cell door. When an

angel appeared to rescue Peter, Peter was sleeping so soundly that the angel had to poke him in the ribs to wake him up.

Why did Peter have such peace in desperate circumstances? He must have relied on Jesus' promise that he would die as an old man (John 21:18–19). Perhaps Peter reasoned he wasn't old yet, and therefore Herod would not be able to execute him. Instead of spending a sleepless night worrying, Peter chose to rely on Jesus' words, cast all his care on him, and get a good night's sleep.

conclusion

On page 93 of *Fear Not*, Ed Love rightly observes: “God wants us to know he can be trusted with whatever is on our heart, even if what is on our heart is our confusion with the way God works. God is the most trustworthy friend we could ever have and he will carry us through any fearful situation.”

7

the long-awaited coming King

John 12:12–19; 19:17–22;
1 Corinthians 15:3
Revelation 19:11–16

introduction

Whether you live in Canada, the United States, or somewhere else, you probably hope a political leader will emerge and end crime, inflation, high taxes, terrorism, injustice, social ills, and other issues. Perhaps you have waited a long time for such a leader, and now your hope is almost exhausted. You can understand, then, how the people of Israel must have felt after waiting for the Messiah for centuries. When Jesus appeared and performed miracles, they thought he was their long-anticipated deliverer, the king who would free them from Roman domination and establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity.

But King Jesus did not enter Israel's capital as a king who would save the nation politically.

sermon outline

I. The Condescending King (John 12:12–19)

A. Arrived in a Humble Manner

In fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9).

B. Acclaimed with Hosannas

Also in fulfillment of prophecy, the welcoming crowd greeted Jesus with shouts of “Hosanna,” meaning, “Save now” (see Ps. 118:25–27). However, the crowd wanted a political salvation, not a salvation from sin.

II. The Crucified King (John 19:17–22; 1 Cor. 15:3)

A. Identified as King of the Jews (John 19:17–22)

When Jesus was nailed to a cross, a notice prepared by Pilate read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

B. Impaled as the Sacrifice for Our Sins (1 Cor. 15:3)

Jesus, the King of the Jews, was impaled on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. John the Baptist had correctly identified him as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

III. The Conquering King (Rev. 19:11–16)

A. His Triumphant Return

Like the Jews who waited long for a deliverer but misunderstood the purpose of Jesus' first coming, perhaps many of us Christians wonder how long it will be before Jesus returns to earth again. We cannot date his return, but we know it will be triumphant. Jesus will return in a blaze of glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

B. His Targeted Retribution

When he returns in triumph, King Jesus will target his enemies. His retribution will be swift and complete. We can be encouraged that evil will not prevail forever. So let us be patient and pray, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

conclusion

Sometimes it seems the "good guys" will lose a baseball game. They are down by one in the bottom of the ninth inning, and their last batter is at the plate. With only one runner on base and the batter having two strikes against him, he swings and hits a homerun. The "good guys" win by a score of two to one.

Let's not give up. Jesus will turn the "game" around. We are on the winning team.

8

a new assignment for a failure

Exodus 2:11–15; 3

introduction

A Chinese saying states that failure is the mother of success. Do you remember the failures you experienced while trying to ride a bicycle? You may have lost your balance more than a few times, crashed, or run into hedge before you finally got your balance and rode like a pro. You learned from each failure, and you did not give up.

Fortunately, God uses failures. He doesn't write us off. He writes us into his plan to serve him successfully.

sermon outline

I. Moses Was a Failure (Ex. 2:11–15; 3:1)

A. He Botched the Killing of an Egyptian (Ex. 2:11–15)

What he thought was a secret killing had been seen. The next day, two Hebrews questioned his right to intervene in their fight. Fearing what Pharaoh might do to him, Moses fled for his life to Midian.

B. He Offered God Failed Excuses (Ex. 3:1—4:17)

God called from a burning bush in Midian, and commissioned Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. But Moses excused himself. He said he was too insignificant for the task. He said he didn't know how to convince the Hebrews that God had commissioned him. He argued that he was a poor speaker. Excuses! Excuses! Excuses!

Are we like Moses? When God calls, do you erect a wall of excuses?

II. God Was Greater Than Moses' Failure (Ex. 3:12—4:17)

A. God Promised His Presence (Ex. 3:12)

God does not call us to go anywhere alone. He is with us always.

B. God Pledged His Reputation (Ex. 3:14–17)

God identified himself as the eternal God of the patriarchs.

C. God Performed Miracles (Ex. 4:2–9)

He showed Moses that nothing is impossible with God.

D. God Provided a Spokesman (Ex. 4:14–17)

We do not have to serve as lone rangers. God has given us broad support. We may draw upon gifted fellow Christians for strength and enablement as we serve him (1 Cor. 12:21–26; Eph. 4:11–16). In addition, he has given us his Spirit, whose power is unlimited (Acts 1:8).

conclusion

Moses' memory of his failure in Egypt almost kept him from becoming one of the greatest liberators in history. Only after God knocked down the memory of Moses' failure and every excuse Moses raised, did Moses return to Egypt, confront Pharaoh, and lead more than two million Hebrews out of slavery. When God calls us to perform a seemingly impossible task, let's refuse to let past failures or present excuses keep us from experiencing God's power to make us successful.



introduction

We should not be surprised when hard times buffet us. Even Jesus and the apostles experienced hard times: adversity, persecution, and even death. God never promised us an easy life, but he does promise to be with us each step of the way. Hebrews 13:5 reminds us that God said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Asaph, the writer of Psalm 73, learned to cherish this truth.

sermon outline

I. Asaph’s Dilemma (Ps. 73:1–16)

A. The Providence of God (Ps. 73:1–2)

Asaph knew God was good to his people, but what he observed shook his confidence in God.

B. The Prosperity of the Wicked (Ps. 73:3–16)

The wicked prospered. They did not seem to endure the hardships and infirmities that were so prone to the righteous. They practiced oppression and blasphemed God—with apparent impunity. Asaph knew they were wrong to do these things, but he could not understand why God allowed them to go unpunished while the righteous suffered.

II. Asaph’s Discovery (Ps. 73:17–22)

A. It Involved a Place (Ps. 73:17)

The answer to Asaph’s dilemma came when he entered the place of worship. Like Hezekiah, Asaph spread the matter before the Lord, and the Lord gave him understanding.

When life seems hard and we can’t understand why the wicked prosper but the righteous suffer, we need to get alone with God and turn the matter over to him.

B. It Involved a Principle (Ps. 73:18–22)

Asaph learned that God will execute his wrath against the wicked. It may not happen according to our timetable, but it will happen. When he understood this principle, Asaph felt guilty of acting as a senseless animal.

III. Asaph's Delight (Ps. 73:23–28)

Upon seeing the issue from God's perspective, Asaph's dilemma turned to delight.

- A. He Delighted in God's Presence (Ps. 73:23–24)
- B. He Delighted in God's Person (Ps. 73:25–26)
- C. He Delighted in God's Protection (Ps. 73:27–28)

conclusion

Hard times can cause stress, but we can use stress to our advantage or disadvantage. We use it to our disadvantage by allowing it to come between God and us. In that position, it drives us farther from him. But if we use it to our advantage, we place it behind us, and it becomes a driving force that pushes us closer to God. Let's wisely use stress the right way!



introduction

Christians can never live where the Lord is not present. He is with us always, but sometimes we may doubt his presence. For example, when a trial strikes us hard, we may wonder where the Lord is. Of course, sin blunts our awareness of the Lord's presence. We may be more aware of his presence in church than at work, especially during stressful times at work. However, he promised to be with us always, and by faith we can rely on his promise.

The apostle John had been banished by the Roman Empire to Patmos, a small, rocky island in the Aegean Sea. But there he received a fresh experience of Jesus' presence. That experience involved an awareness of Jesus' presence, adoration of Jesus' person, and an assignment from Jesus.

sermon outline

I. An Awareness of Jesus' Presence (Rev. 1:9-10)

Although John had been banished to Patmos, he stayed true to the faith. Likely two factors heightened John's awareness of Jesus' presence.

A. It Was the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10)

Perhaps John was observing the Lord's Day in a worshipful manner.

B. He Was in the Spirit (Rev. 1:10)

By being in the Spirit, John was open to the Lord's presence.

II. Adoration of Jesus' Person (Rev. 1:11-17)

John fell down at Jesus' feet, but Jesus said to fear not. John had been enthralled with who Jesus was.

A. The Son of Man among the Churches (Rev. 1:12-13, 20)

B. The Glorious Eternal, Omnipotent Lord (Rev. 1:14-18)

There seems to be a tendency today to over humanize Jesus to the neglect of his lordship. We dare not minimize his true humanity, but neither should we minimize his deity. He is the God-man, who deserves our full adoration.

III. An Assignment from Jesus (Rev. 1:19–20)

Jesus assigned to John the task of writing what he saw, what was happening, and what would take place. In other words, John was tasked to write the book of Revelation.

Spending time in the Lord's presence often increases our awareness of what he wants us to do. As we meditate on his Word, we become more knowledgeable of his will for us.

conclusion

It has been observed, "If you don't feel as close to the Lord as you once were, guess who moved?" Let's draw as close to the Lord as we can for an enhanced awareness of his presence, to adore him in all his splendor, and to be available for whatever he wants us to do!