

In June of 1972 I went to church camp at Central Oak Heights. I was ten years old. It was there that I answered the greatest invitation ever made to me in my young life.

Under the canopy of trees that formed the outdoor chapel I responded to the invitation to open the door of my heart and welcome Jesus Christ into my life. Since that moment onward I've had a personal relationship with Jesus.

How about you? Do you remember when and where you responded to that invitation? Maybe it was when you were a child at a camp, or in Sunday school. Maybe it happened in your teens at a youth event. Maybe it happened as an adult? It's good to think about that experience with God.

Maybe you don't have a place or time; it could be that you are still searching to understand this idea of a personal relationship with Jesus. That is ok, because by your presence here today you at least indicate that you are seeking to learn more. Maybe today something will spark a conversation we can have later today or whenever you are ready to explore this idea of a personal relationships with Jesus.

One thing is certain in my life; that wasn't the only invitation from God to which I've responded. Invitations to join God's work in big and small ways came through God speaking into my life- sometimes in ways that can only be described as divine appointments and sometimes simply through God working through others who have been part of my life.

Since accepting that first invitation when I was ten; probably the most significant invitation came at another camp experience in June of 1979 at Messiah College. That was the summer before my senior year in high school. There God issued an invitation that would change the direction of my life forever.

One afternoon while we were resting from our early mornings and late nights I was lying on my bed. In the quiet of that room I felt the presence of God in a way unlike any I had ever experienced before. And while I was laying there I heard God's invitation- an invitation to take a step of faith and become a pastor.

Like Samuel who heard the voice of God and ran to his mentor Eli, I ran to seek out my pastor who was just down the hall. After we talked I went back to my room and decided that if God was willing to invite me into His work then I would accept the invitation.

Little did I understand the transformations that would need to take place in my life to join God in his work; but one thing is certain with each step I took forward God revealed how he was at work.

Let me just tell you about one of those ways that God confirmed his invitation. Shortly after I declared my intention to enter the ministry I knew that I wanted to attend Messiah

College. That decision was going to be a financial challenge. But God had already set in motion the answer to the challenge long before I ever said yes to the invitation.

You see, years before I ever heard the invitation, God had moved in the heart of a woman from my church to establish in her will a Ministerial Education Fund. What is really interesting is that no one in my church had any idea who this woman was. And she had died many years before the church ever received notice of the funds being available.

That money arrived just in time to help me pay a portion of my tuition. The fund continued to grow over the years and paid for not only college but seminary- and not just for me but many others who followed in the years after.

You see when you are invited to join in God's work; God is already preparing the way forward. All God is waiting for is for you to respond to the invitation.

My life has been blessed ever since I accepted the invitation. It hasn't always been easy. It didn't always go the way that I thought it should; but I've never been disappointed by accepting God's invitation to be involved with God in his work.

Has God been inviting you to join in the work that God is doing around you?

God works primarily through people like you and me who are willing to love God and willing to obey when he speaks. (More in the next two weeks on how we hear God speak!) You and I are God's plan A! There is no Plan B. We're God's next step. How you live your life isn't optional; it is a part of God's plan and the difference you and I are expected to make in this world isn't optional either.

God is right now inviting you to participate in the work that God is doing all around you. And I for one don't want to miss out on the opportunity! And I hope you don't want to miss the opportunity to make a difference.

How many of you watched the Memorial for Joe Paterno this past Thursday? It was inspiring to hear the testimonies from players in every decade that he coached. What is equally impressive is to connect the decades of influence Joe had back to his father. When Joe decided to coach instead of pursue the law his father told him; 'Whatever you do promise me you will make a difference.'

The thousands of students and student-athletes that he touched, the countless number of individuals he helped, the inspiration he brought to so many is a testimony that Joe always remembered the words of his father and truly made a difference with his life.

Joe watched his father and learned how to make a difference. Sounds like the same pattern Jesus displayed! Remember Jesus' words in John 5:19: "I do whatever I see the Father doing."

Later Jesus would tell his disciples that they should do what they saw him doing. And then Jesus gave them this promise in John 14:12: "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these."

God is inviting us, you and me, to make a difference- to change the world! But no matter how many times he makes the invitation it comes down to whether you and I are willing to say, "YES!"

Maybe it hasn't been an invitation to accept the call to ordained ministry; but God is always extending invitations for disciples of Jesus to be involved in God's work.

Maybe your invitation to change the world begins at home. God could be inviting you to ...

Maybe the world that you will change is in your place of work by...

Maybe the change will happen through you responding to the invitation here at the church to...

Maybe the world that you change will belong to a person you serve through one of our mission activities...

When God invites you to become involved in his work; God uses your passion, your position and your potential to change the world. So whatever God invites you to do; God also equips you to successfully carry out His plan. Remember this: God will not act apart from people who love God and are willing to obey when he speaks. God needs us as much as we need God if we are going to change the world.

I've been witnessing some changes as people are responding to God's invitation. The change was evident in a conversation I had recently with someone new to the church. The change came in a letter that I received this past week. The change is unmistakable in people taking bold leaps of faith as they step up to take on roles of leadership in bold new initiatives intended to help us change lives one at a time!

One thing I know for certain is that YOUR LIFE, YOUR WORLD will change when you accept God's invitation.

I want to invite you to look at the screen this morning as we close. [Image of Jesus Standing at the Door knocking] This picture of Jesus knocking at the door is a great visual of God's invitation. Like Jesus words in Rev 3:20 it is up to us to open the door of our heart and welcome Jesus in.

So as we close this morning I want to invite you to ask in your heart the following things:

Have I welcomed Jesus into my heart?

What work is God inviting me to join him in doing?

I hope that when you leave here today you will have an answer to these two questions; but most importantly I pray that you will act in a way that says you love God by choosing to obey his invitation.