

Have you ever felt like you were in over your head? What did you do?

Hank's first real job as a landscape contractor was to blow up a large tree stump that was blocking a man's proposed driveway. Hank was wet behind the ears, but he didn't want this man to know it. He wanted very much to impress him.

Although inwardly nervous, he acted like he knew exactly what he was doing. He packed a large load of dynamite under the stump and carefully measured out the wick. Then Hank said a quick prayer and pushed the detonator. With a ground-shaking rumble the stump soared into the air and landed with a crash - on the cab of Hank's pick-up truck, thoroughly flattening it.

Hank's client stood there for a long moment looking at the destruction then commented, "Well, you didn't miss it by much. With a little more practice, you'll be landing those suckers in the truck bed every time."

Hank, got in trouble, because he acted like he knew what was going on. Hank got in trouble, because he wanted to handle it all on his own. Hank got in trouble, because he knew he was in over his head but he didn't seek help, he tried to handle it all on his own. Have you ever been in over your head? What did you do? How did you handle that?

Last week, we started a new sermon series. It is called *Building a Life that Matters*, and we started talking about the importance of discovering that God has called each of us to ministry. When we let God be at the center of who we are, when we discover that we belong and we matter, then we begin to live for more than for ourselves. That is when life starts to become meaningful. Today, we are going to talk about dealing with our own doubts about being called by God.

I suspect there are one or two people who are saying right about now, "Not me. It can't be me. God isn't calling me. I don't know what to do, I don't know where to turn."

Our bible is filled with stories of people who, like us, were called by God who didn't feel up to the task. In our scripture for today, Israel is an

overrun, defeated nation. The Midianites during this time were a stronger force, literally pushing the Israelites around. Because of that, it caused many in the land to pray to God, asking for deliverance.

Here is how God responded. God arrived in front Gideon, who was threshing wheat in the winepress. Here is what that really means, Gideon can't thresh wheat out in the open, because the cloud that would arise would surely draw unwanted attention from a Midianite raiding party. So he is simply hiding, getting his work done.

It is to him, that God comes through a messenger and says, "God is with you, you mighty warrior." I love it. Do you catch the irony here? Here is a man, hiding, getting his work done, who is hailed as a mighty warrior.

I love Gideon's response. "God is with me? What are you talking about? God isn't here. God isn't doing the wondrous things God did from old, like when God delivered our people from Israel. No. No. God has left us and now we are subject to the whims of the Midianites. God has left us to fend for ourselves."

Have you ever felt abandoned? Have you ever felt like you are left to fend for yourself? Are you waiting for someone else to come along and make your life better?

I think we do this all the time. It is easier to stand by and say things like, "The politicians in Madison or Washington are screwing up our world something fierce." It is easier to stand by and say things like, "You know, it's my parents fault that I am the way I am." It is easier to stand by and say if things go wrong in the church, "You know, it the pastor's fault." It is simply easier to blame others for what is going wrong in the world or in our lives.

But blaming others doesn't solve the problem.

The messenger from God listened to Gideon and said, "Look, it is time for you to go in this strength of yours and make a difference. Go and save Israel from Midian." Do you hear the irony again?

Gideon is whining and complaining. He is not acting strong at all. Yet he is the one God is sending to this task of saving Israel.

I love this story, if you read the rest of it; you discover that Gideon is so filled with doubt, that he puts God to the test, to see if God will really be with him. God shows that God will be there for Gideon and not abandon him in the ministry to which he has been called.

This story of Gideon's call is meant to encourage us to listen to and respond to God's call in our lives. Because this story shows us once again that the people God uses to make a difference in this world are people like you and me. People who are average, every-day kind of people.

But when we say yes to God in our lives, God is able to work through us to do incredible things in this world.

Stu Weber tells of a time he discovered how important it was to lend a helping hand. He was in Army Ranger School. It was exhausting and draining. One day they went out for their morning run. But this was no ordinary run. They ran in full field uniform. As usual the word was, "You go out together, stick together, you work as a unit, and you come in together. If you don't come in together, don't bother to come it!"

Somewhere along the way, through the fog of the pain, thirst, and fatigue, Stu's brain registered something strange about the formation. Two rows ahead of him, he noticed one of the guys out of sync. A big, rawboned redhead named Sanderson. His legs were pumping, but he was out of step. Then his head began to loll from side to side. This guy was struggling. Close to losing it.

Without missing a step, the Ranger on Sanderson's right reached over and took the distressed man's rifle. Now one of the Rangers was carrying two, heavy weapons. The big redhead did better for a time. But then, while the platoon kept moving, his jaw became slack, his eyes glazed and his legs pushed like pistons. Soon his head began to sway again.

This time the Ranger on the other side of him, reached over and removed Sanderson's helmet, and tucked it under his own arm and continued to run. Everything went along fairly smoothly for a while. But as we

continued running, it was obvious to see Sanderson was seriously hurting. He almost fell. But two soldiers behind him picked him up and then lifted the pack off his back, each taking a soldier strap in his free hand. Sanderson gathered his remaining strength, squared his shoulders, and the platoon made it to the finish.

They left together. They returned together. Together is better.

God has called each of us to ministry. God has called us to make a difference. Who we are really, truly does matter. We are called into a community of faith. We are called to give our lives to God. We are called to let God work through us. That means reaching out, lending a hand to those around us who need it.

When we get in over our head, we don't have to go it alone. We don't even have to blame others. We turn to God, we work together, and we let God work through us to make a difference in our life and in our world.

Amen