

When God Crosses Our Path

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: 1 Kings 17:7-24, Acts 9:10-16, Acts 9:26-27

Speaker: Josh Duran

July 30, 2023

Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Josh Duran. I'm the director of high school ministries here at Fairview missionary church in it's been an awesome ride so far. But just as Levi said earlier today, today is family Sunday, so you might see some younger faces around and if your kids start to get a little squirmy or a little too much, start to make noise. Get them out of here. Now I'm just kidding. Nope, nope.

I'm very much used to teenagers talking when we're talking. So it'll be okay. I'll completely ignore them. Trust me on that one. So, but also it is a family Sunday, anything can happen. Unfortunately, my wife is not here with me today. She's the one that kind of keeps me on the straight and narrow, so to speak. I mean, she likes sitting in the front row, like giving me baseball signs. She's like, you know, it's going a little too long.

Time to get out of here. Like, come on. Wrap things up. So if I go a little too long, I'm sorry. It's her fault. So no, I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. But yeah, it is family Sunday. I love family Sunday. We're going to be in first kings chapter 17 to start off with. So if you want to turn with me to first king 17, and we're going to actually end in acts chapter 9.

So I believe God just gave me this message today of when God crosses our paths and I'm looking forward to see what comes out of it. But before we get into anything, I'm going to pray for us this morning. Generally, father got to just thank you for today. Got to thank you for this opportunity just to come into your presence. Got to pray that you would use my vocal cords to be your instrument, God. And I pray that you would just give us your word this morning and got to pray that it would just penetrate our hearts.

God, I pray for all the area churches that their seeds would be filled, God. And that they would hear your message and they would turn towards you, got to pray for the pastors and the speakers at each and every church, and I pray that they would just listen to your voice and communicate it in a way that people understand. So I give you all the praise in the glory this morning, and Jesus name, amen. Well, as I was beginning to prepare for this message, passer Joel told me I'd be speaking on this weekend, you know, all the way back in January.

So being a good youth passer, I started about two weeks ago to prepare for this message. No, I'm just kidding. And he's not going to let me do this again. It's great. But I began to just ask him. What do you want me to talk about? And I believe he just kept putting two things on my brain. It just kept coming back and back and back is my friends and my family. My friends and my family.

And so I began to reflect on this summer of all the times I got to hang out with my friends, we actually had the opportunity to move into Reddington heights last summer here in Angola. And that was also the time I started here at the church. So we moved and got a new job. It was awesome. Transition. But I just, as I began to meet people here at the church, I realized that three fourths of Fairview lives in Reddington heights.

And so me and pastor Sam have dubbed it Fairview heights. So if you ever get invited to Fairview heights, just know that's what we're talking about. But it's awesome because I know a lot of people back there get to just walk around the block and I run into three or four people. I know. I feel safe that my kids can go out

and hang out with their friends because they know a lot of the kids from the church. And so it's just been a really cool blessing to be able to spend time with my friends back in Reddington heights.

And then this summer, our youth group got the chance to go to Cedar Point, which was an awesome experience. Believe it or not, I am too big to ride the rides. Which I am. And which is the right call. But I got the chance to just hang out with kids all day. It was students all day. It was awesome. I got to just get to know them better, build these relationships, and just learn more about them and we talk about the upcoming school year, which is looking a week and a half.

And you know we just had a real good time. Let's see your point. Also, I'm the boy sports director at Angola kids league. Which is just the league that puts on baseball and football here in the community for the kids. And so I got the opportunity to run two different tournaments for regular season than for our all stars. And so I spent a lot of time down at the ball fields just having all sorts of conversations. I got to even have some really awesome godly conversations.

And I had to have some not so godly conversations because someone was yelling at our own pyres. And if that's you, knock it off. All right. So it was awesome to see all these people as I am a people person. So I love to get into these conversations. But the line that God just kept giving me over and over as I prepared for this week was you just never know who's going to cross your path. You know, and I feel like this is how God communicates to me.

He goes, Josh, I put those people there for you. That's how God speaks to me. I don't know how he speaks to you. But that's how he speaks to me. You know, I believe God put these people in my path for a purpose. It was not by accident that these people cross my path. And so, you know, I believe God does this because he wants to impact us through us.

He wants to use us to impact us. And so I use this analogy with my teenagers last week, you know, you know, when I'm going through a rough season or I'm having a low point in my life or, you know, I'm just, I just need, you know, cared for, you know, God planted this caring tree in the back of my house. And so I go and I just give it a big old bear hug, and then I feel cared for. I'm just kidding, I don't do that. I'm not weird. I promise.

But my point I was making is, in order to care for each other, we have to be there for each other. God put people on this planet to care for people. You didn't plant trees to care for people, right? It's people that are caring for people. And that was my point. I was making to our teens as we are talking about caring for one another. And so I began to run this kind of through a number test here for a second because I do have an engineering background.

And so I started to think about how long I live for. Well, Google tells me that average age is 79 years old. But Google also tells me we don't start remembering people's names until you're roughly 5 years old. So about 5 years old is when people start kind of, okay, that name goes with that face and you start to remember people's names. And so $79 - 5 = 74$, I'm averaging or I'm averaging that people meet three new people a day.

I'm just going to put it at three for like me. It's probably like 15. Because I like to talk to people. But if you're more like my daughter, only likes to talk to maybe one person a day, you know, it might be a little lower. And to that fact, my son is just like me. So if you run into my son, I'm sorry, but he's like me. So on average, three new people a day for 365 days a year, over 74 years, that's roughly around 81,000 people.

So 81,000 people are going to cross your path. And so I began to look at that number going, how am I doing? How am I doing with all those people that God is intentionally put in my path? And I began to just like, am I taking this serious? Like when I go to Walmart, am I actually looking at these people crossing my

path? Like, God, did this intentionally? Or like when I was sitting at Cedar Point, waiting for my group to get down at the ride?

And all these people that are just crossing my path. I'm like, is God doing this intentionally? I began to just ask these questions. And I believe God led me to this scripture and first king 17. The story of Elijah. And how he led him to this cross path with this widow. And so that's what we're going to do this, we're going to read this story, Elijah, just to catch you up on this story, Elijah, who's a prophet, who speaks to God, and God speaks to him, to give the message to the people.

He gets this message from God, which is not a good message, but he says, hey, there's going to be this drought. And there's going to be this famine. And Elijah's job is to go tell the king. And as you can imagine, the king is not so thrilled about this because it's going to hurt his image, right? There's this famine and there's this drought coming. So Elijah is on the run and to get away from this king to let him go cool off. And God leaves him to this brook, where there's still this water in this brook.

And God actually sends these ravens to bring him food and bread so that he can eat. But then the brook is going to dry up. And God is going to send him down a different path. And that's where we're going to pick it up in the story here. Maybe. There we go. All right, it goes like this. It says sometime later, the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the lord came to him.

Go at once to zephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I directed a widow there to supply you with food. So he went as air fat when he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink as she was going to get it he called out and bring me please a piece of bread. So Elijah follows God's commands.

He goes to the city where he meets this widow and he asked for a drink of water and then goes, oh wait, I'm a hungry too. Sounds like a pretty normal guy, right? All right, so going on in verse 12 says, as surely as the lord your God lives, she replies, I don't have any bread. Only a handful of flour and a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I'm gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son that we may eat it and die.

Now, if you're a parent, you're probably going to connect with the story just a little bit more than, say, a teenager. But you got to put your try to put yourself in this woman's shoes, right? She's literally going to make her last bit of food that she has. And then her and her son are going to die. Now, I don't know what it's like to be in that situation, but I got to imagine the mental state of this lady is probably in a pretty bad place.

And I don't know how Elijah initially reacts, but it sounds like he speaks pretty boldly. Check out what he says. Elijah said to her, don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first, make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me. And then making something for yourself and your son. So the audacity that Elijah has here is pretty bold, right? He's saying, hey, I know you think this is your last meal.

And I know you think you're gonna die, but take what you have left and make me something first. Now, again, putting yourself in that lady's shoes, I mean, how does she know Elijah is who he says he is. We know who Elijah is. We know how the story ends because we can read it. But she doesn't know that. How does she know that he's not just being a con artist to get just some food so that he can live and keep moving on, right? Is she to know this?

But Elijah goes on and he says, for this is what the lord the God of Israel says. The jar of flour will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not run dry to the day, the lord sends The Rain on this land. So he's asking her for a little bit of faith so that God can show up and do something really cool. And of course, as we know, God does just this. There we go.

She went away and did as Elijah had told her, so there was food every day for Elijah and the woman in her family for the jar was not used up. The jug of oil did not run dry and keeping with the word of the lord spoken by Elijah. So God shows up and he does this really awesome thing through Elijah. He crosses Elijah with this woman's past path to help save her and to save Elijah.

And you know it seems like Elijah's put in this position has crossed this path of just the right moment, right? Because she's expecting to die in the Elijah comes in, saves the day, right? Through God's plan and will, right? But I remember when I was younger and I had to get a job to help support my family. And I looked all over and I could not just find a job.

And I was like, I didn't know what to do. I was scrambling around. And I was like, God, I need someone to help me get a job. And sure enough, he provided the person to come into my life, provided me a job in order to take care of my family, and to actually get me through school. And I remember looking back on that day like, God, that was awesome timing. Please do it sooner next time.

But, you know, it was cool how it got my faith to strengthen that day because of God helping provide that right person to cross my path. And I imagine that's how Elijah fell. Elijah is like, all right, I can start to buy in just a little bit more now. And I can trust God because he's going to have me cross paths at just the right time. And I don't know what it is for you, but maybe it's addiction. And maybe you're looking for someone across the path.

And I believe that God is going to send someone across your path to help you get free of your addiction. Or maybe you're just lost in life at this point. You're like, I don't know where I'm going. I don't know if I'm going to point A today or point B I don't know what I'm doing. I believe God. Can send someone across your path and help you go in the right direction. And my first main point out of three this morning is this.

Don't miss your blessing by ignoring your neighbor because God crosses paths for our benefit. God will cross our paths with people for our benefit. He'll put the right person in our life at the right time to help us get through whatever season of life we're going through. But I wish I could stop there, but I can't because the story goes on. God actually has more to this story for Elijah that Elijah didn't know going into this, which I think is so cool.

What happens? So let's check it out. It says this, sometime later, the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, what do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my son and kill me? Now, I don't know what that sometime later is. I don't know how long that is.

But I got to guess that things weren't going very well from the time that Elijah showed up and initially helped keep the food coming in. It sounds like it's not going so well because she doesn't just jump to accusing someone of reminding of her sin and killing her son. If it happened just like that, right? There had been some time there of not so good things going on. But listen to Elijah's response.

He says, give me your son, Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the lord, lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow, I am staying with by causing her son to die, then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the lord, lord my God, let this boy's life return.

And so I'm reading this and I'm like, okay, there's definitely one thing here. Elijah has definitely built this relationship with this son and this woman. Because it leads him to cry out on their behalf. Even after being accused, he goes and cries out on their behalf. And so those story keeps going and it says, the lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boys live return to him, and he lived.

Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, look, your son is alive. Then the woman said to Elijah, now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the lord from your mouth is truth. Now, I know Elijah was expecting God to do some really cool things when he said he was going to help this widow with the bread in the water and stuff.

And I know he was expecting to do some really cool things. But a little bit of me wonders, did Elijah really expect to do something so cool like this? Was he coming to this town expecting to do to seek God to a miracle through him? And I start to think about how much different the story could have been. If Elijah just had been like just into himself, like, you know, I'm here, I saved the day, I saved your bread, and I saved your water.

And then he gets accused. He could have been like, well, then, okay. I'm going to leave, right? But he didn't. He had compassion, and he showed up for this lady and cried out to God. And he was able to help this family. My point being that if we can get our eyes off of what we want to do, and we get our eyes pointed on what God wants to do through us, God crosses our paths for others benefit too.

We have to shift our focus from how can people cross our paths to help me to how can I help somebody else by God crossing my path with them? And so I gave this little talk to our teenagers last week again because we were talking about care, and I feel like this just fits so well with where we're going this morning. But I wonder what happens if our church becomes the church that boldly prays to God every morning and says, you know what, God?

If there is someone who is having a bad time in their life or in a rough season of their life, you make sure they cross paths with me. Because I'm going to care about them, I'm going to love them. And I'm going to make sure they have hope by the time they keep going that day. God, when I go to Walmart today, and there's someone who just needs a little bit of help. God, you make sure they bump into my car on the bread aisle. Because I'm going to help them. I'm going to serve them. And I'm going to show them what you mean to them through me.

I just wonder what would happen if we began to take our eyes off ourself and began to look at the people crossing our path as God being intentional and God saying, I want to use you to help them. I just wonder what happened if we would just be a little bit more intentional of the people crossing our path. So we've looked this morning about how God uses things in our lives and crosses our paths with other people's benefits and for our benefits.

But my last point for this morning is I believe God crosses paths for his benefit. Now I'm not saying God needs us because that's not true. If God wants something done, he's going to get it done. But I believe God wants to use us. I believe God wants to further his kingdom by using us. And we see, we see all sorts of examples of it from scripture, but I think the most, the most notable one in scripture is the conversion of Saul in the New Testament.

And that's what we're going to jump to acts chapter 9. And basically, if you don't know who Saul is, he was a bad, bad dude. Very bad. If he walked into this church today, we probably would all ran out the back. He's very bad dude. He was known for killing Christians, imprisoning them, and doing very bad things to Jesus followers. And one day, he's on his way to a town called Damascus, and Jesus meets him in the middle of the road and said, this is not your path.

This is not what I intended for you, Saul. You have something so much better plan for your life. And so he blinds Saul and send him to Damascus where he's going to be cared for by other Jesus followers. And so that's where we're going to pick up this story. That Saul is blind in Damascus and just waiting for Jesus to do something in his life. And it goes like this. It says, in Damascus, there was a disciple named ananias.

Well, I have been practicing that name all week. The lord called him in a vision. Ananias, yes, lord he answered. The lord told him, go to the house of Judas on straight street, and ask for a man from tarsus named Saul for he is praying. In a vision, he has seen a man named ananias, come in place his hands on him to restore his sight. I forgot to go to the next one. I'm sorry.

And so Anne and I, obviously, he knows who Saul is. We know who Saul is. And if Jesus asked us to go to Seoul, we would have the same reaction that ananias does. He has some reservations. We'll say, he was a little scared to go face this man named Saul. In fact, we read he says, lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.

And he has come here with authority from the chief priest to arrest all who call on your name. But the lord said to ananias, go, this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the gentiles and their kings into the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer in my name. So of course, anonymous is a little scared as we would all be if we had the same task, but Jesus looks right past it and says, go.

I have plans for this man. I have chosen him. He's a chosen instrument. And so I read that, and I go, do I believe that? When I see those people that look just a little different than me that walk through the church, do I believe that they're chosen or when I go into Walmart into the bread aisle? I hope you get what I'm catching here. The bread aisles where you meet people, right?

When you go to the bread island, Walmart and you see someone walking in and you go, they're chosen instruments, God chose them. Jesus chooses them. Do I believe that? That's what I'm getting out of this scripture. But more importantly than that, when I go home and I look myself in the mirror, do I believe that I'm a chosen instrument, can I honestly look at myself in the day and go, God, you chose me?

This isn't all by accident. I just happened to get hired at a church. No, God, chooses us. And what I believe this morning is that we are all chosen instruments to use by God to further his kingdom here on earth. We are all chosen instruments. You see, ananias, he does go and do exactly what Jesus commanded him to do.

And I think this is such a powerful and necessary part of Saul's journey that a Jesus follower, not Jesus, a Jesus follower would go and restore his sight and help Saul, get on his new journey of walking with Jesus. Saul needed to see a Christian come to his aid in his rescue and send him on a new journey.

You know, but I think we can, I think we can all stop and take a note of and in an ISS initial reaction, how many times have we heard of someone turning their feet towards Christ or starting this relationship with Jesus? And you're like, eh, I don't know. He's still going to the bar. He's still posting those nasty things on social media. How many times have we done that and go, I don't know if that was authentic or if that was true.

As a text goes on, it actually says that that Paul Ersel regains his strength, and he eats, and he spends several days with the disciples there, and then he actually goes out on the street and starts preaching himself. Instead of trying to imprison these Jews, now he's trying to go out and spread the good name of Jesus. I mean, have you ever witnessed something like this?

I love when I hear these stories of these people who are like, they're the total, farthest person I would ever think would ever turn their feet towards Christ. And then you see them actually going out and spreading the name of Jesus. I'm telling you, if you've never witnessed it, if you've never been up front and personal with that, I'm telling you you're missing out. It is one of the best feelings in the world. When you see someone totally far away from Christ, turn their feet and start to walk with Jesus.

It is an amazing thing that could happen. But there was Jews in this Damascus that just did not want to see it. They didn't believe it. They were like, oh, okay, Saul. Okay. Yeah, of course, and of course, you met Jesus, right? They were thinking that Saul is just lying in order to get with them and then kill them or imprison

them. And so they begin to make up their own plot. And they're like, you know, we'll take care of Saul before he takes care of us.

And so Jesus had to rely on other believers, other disciples that come around and protect Saul while he was still trying to start his journey towards Christ. In fact, they had to sneak him out of Damascus and send him to Jerusalem, where he would go and he would preach in Jerusalem, the good name of Jesus, which I think is ironic because his initial his initial dissenters initial journey was to go to Damascus and prison them, take them to Jerusalem and have them killed.

But he's not doing that this time. No, Jesus met him on the road. Now he's going to Jerusalem, not to imprison these people, but to set them free. I thought that was so cool how this story, how this story plays out. But it took those disciples, protecting soul in order for him to fulfill his mission. I don't know about you, but I do not want to be the person that stands in the way of someone becoming a saw to a Paul.

If you don't know, Saul ends up going on in his name changes the Paul. And he goes on to write most of the New Testament that we read in our bibles today. And so I don't want to be that person that stands in the way of someone that is really looking to fulfill the God given purpose and journey for them. In fact, when he initially reaches Jerusalem, check out what happens.

It says this. It says, when he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. I mean, I kind of understand it, right? I mean, if you're a disciple there, I mean, do you really believe what Saul is really claiming that he did, that he met Jesus that he's really preaching? There's no way I'm going to believe a guy with that amount of baggage that this guy has.

Unfortunately, that's how that's what we still do in the church today. We see someone walk into the church all with tattoos. And we're like, I don't know. Someone who has just a little stench of alcohol in their breath. And you're like, mmm, I don't know. Check what it took for Saul to make his conversion to Paul. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the lord and the lord had spoken to him and how in Damascus, he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. Jesus radically flips this guy's life upside down, and he had to rely on his disciples to go before Saul and prepare the way. That can be us today too. We can do the same exact thing.

Saul needed those followers to accept him, believe in him, and truly want what is best for him. I just keep questioning myself, do I do that? Do I really believe in those people who are radically changing their life towards Jesus? We all need someone to believe in us. We're all going to have opposition. We're all going to have obstacles. That's why we got to continue meeting together.

That's why we got to continue doing life together. That's why we got to continue going and spreading the name of Jesus together. I don't know about you. But I want God to use me in that way. I want to be an Ananias. I want to be a Barnabas. And today you may be here for the first time, or you may just be wrestling with this whole God thing. I don't know if I can just really go down this journey.

I don't know if I can really start this relationship. I don't know if I can go all in. Maybe just Sundays. I don't know if I can go all in. I want you to know our past and cross on accident. That is on purpose that you are here, or you're watching online, and you're hearing this message. I know all of us have a purpose. I know all of us have a plan. I don't know what your purpose. And I don't know what you're playing is. That's between you and God.

But I do know that maybe there's someone in this room today that your purpose is to be an anonymous. That you are to radically so boldly go do something that no one else will do. To go up to someone who has radically changed their life and say, you know what? You can do this. Or maybe you're here to be one of

those disciples. That sees someone radically change your life and go, you know what? I'm going to pull them back from the bad influence.

I'm going to keep them away from the drugs and alcohol. I'm going to keep them away from the porn on the screen. I'm going to keep them away from the stuff that's pulling them back. Or maybe your purpose is to be a Barnabas. To really boldly believe in someone. They might not even know their purpose. But you do. And you know that the talent that they have, or you know the path that they can go down to. And you want to know how you would know if you're a Barnabas? You got that person's name right here.

You've been thinking about it the last 20 minutes. God has been saying, you need to go talk to this person. That's where you get to be a Barnabas to someone and say, you know what? You're doing good, but God can do better. And you can do something so cool and amazing. And you just encourage them. And you just be their biggest fan. You be their number one fan. And lastly, maybe you're a Saul this morning.

Looking to become appalled, maybe you've met Jesus on that road to Damascus, or maybe Jesus is going to meet you on that road here this morning. My prayer is that you would stop and just listen and connect and start that relationship with Jesus. I don't know what your guys plan is. I don't know what your purpose is, but I do know this. Maybe. Nope.

There we go. God crosses paths for a purpose. He does it on purpose. My prayer for our church is as we go out into the community. As we go to the ball fields, as we go to the football stands, as we go to the fairgrounds, that all those people that are crossing our path is on purpose. It's not an accident. That God is putting those people in our lives.

My prayers that we would boldly just reach out to these people, give them a glimpse of hope. Just give them a smile. Give them a wave. Take the AirPods out for 5 seconds. That's my challenge. That's my prayer to us, is that we went and just see people walk in front of us, but we say, you know what? God did that on purpose. I'm going to talk to this person. God crossed my path. And it was on purpose. So if you're here today and you think you just need a little extra prayer, we're going to have prayer team on the side that you guys can come down to and pray.

This is the thing that we're going to keep doing. And we're going to keep it an ongoing thing. If you just need some prayer, there's people down here willing to pray for you. Let's pray. Do you hear how many father God I just thank you for today? Got to thank you for this time that we get to just come together and be with you and hear from you. Got to pray for those people who are like ananias. And they know that you are calling them to boldly go and do something that people might just scratch their head.

It got to pray, you'd give them the boldness and the courage to go do it. Got to pray for those people who know there to be accountability partners with somebody and just help them reach their full purpose and their plan. Got to pray for those who feel like their Barnabas who've been thinking about that one guy or girl. This whole time. That they need to go talk to, got to pray that you would just send them to do that and that they would just encourage them and love them right where they are.

I'm going to pray for those who think they're assault. And they need to become Paul. And I pray that you would just just meet them right where they're at. They don't have to do anything special except just accept an invitation in a relationship with you. You've got to pray that they would do that. God, we just turn this all over to you. You've got to praise. We go on to the community guide that we would be the best Jesus followers possible. Got to pray that you waited, protect our eyes, protect our ears and protect our mouths as they all lead straight to our hearts and ask this in Jesus name.

Amen.