

# 12. Ventures of Faith

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of venturing out in faith, trusting God's sovereignty, and guarding against presumption in order to discover God's will and experience His blessings.*

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 14:6, 2 Kings 6:24-33, 2 Kings 7:3, 2 Kings 7:19, 2 Chronicles 14:11, 2 Chronicles 15:2, 2 Chronicles 16:9, Esther 4:14, Romans 8:31, Hebrews 11:6

**Topics:** "Trusting God's Will", "Faith Ventures"

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## Description

Chuck Smith emphasizes the significance of stepping out in faith to discover God's will, illustrating that God can work through anyone willing to venture forth. He warns against presumption and relying solely on human effort when God's hand is not evident, sharing personal experiences of faith ventures that succeeded and those that did not. Smith highlights biblical examples, such as Jonathan and the four lepers, to show that God can accomplish great things through a few faithful individuals. He encourages believers to remain flexible and open to God's direction, avoiding the trap of clinging to failing programs or efforts. Ultimately, the message is about making oneself available to God and trusting Him to lead the way.

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## Transcript

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Hebrews 11:6

It's always an exciting thing to give God a chance to work. God wants you to be a part of what He is doing. God doesn't want to stop working, so it's important for us to discover what He wants to do. I have found that the way we discover how God wants to work is to venture out in faith. We need to step out and see what the Lord might do. But, as we step out in faith, there has to be a guard against presumption. A lot of people who test the waters to see what God might want to do make a serious mistake by falling back on human effort when God's hand obviously is not in it. Sometimes we can get so committed to something that our reputation seems to be on the line. Then we start pumping extra energy and effort into a program that wasn't of God to begin with.

I've ventured out many times only to discover that God wasn't in it. What do you do then? You retreat. What gets us into trouble is when we proudly say, "We're going to make this thing succeed." We find

ourselves spending all of our energy trying to create something that God isn't a part of, and it can just rip you up. When I step out in faith, if it succeeds, I rejoice and say, "Great! The Lord led me." If it doesn't succeed, I step back and say, "I thought it was a good idea, but it sure fell on its nose." So, I think that there are certain precautions that one must take in any venture in faith.

In the Old Testament, we have the story of Saul. During the time of his reign he established a standing army. He was commander over the larger part, and Jonathan was over the lesser part. It wasn't a big army, but the Philistines had invaded the land and were determined this time to completely wipe out Israel. They had amassed large forces of troops and chariots. They were such an awesome military threat that most of the Israeli army deserted and fled to the other side of the Jordan River. There were just a few men left, and they were fearful. Then Jonathan woke up one night with what must have been either a troubling thought, or an exciting thought. If God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel, He doesn't need the whole army. If God wants to work, He can work with one man as easily as one hundred thousand men.

Now, when you stop to think about that from a logical standpoint, it's really true. God doesn't need a whole army. All God needs is one person in harmony with His purpose. God can accomplish His desires through one man. All He needs is just one man. That's both a challenging and exciting thought. That thought kept Jonathan awake until he finally woke up his armor bearer and said, "Let's go over and see if God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel today."

So, they took a venture in faith. It's having a mindset that says, "Let's see if God wants to work today. Let's see what God might want to do today." It's simply making yourself available. But Jonathan did set up a safeguard. As they were on their way over to the Philistine camp, he said, "We have to make sure God is in this. So when we're spotted by their sentries, if they say to us, 'Hey, you guys! What are you doing here? Wait, we're going to come down and teach you a lesson.' Then we'll know that God doesn't want to deliver the Philistines today. But if they say, 'Hey, you guys! Come up here and we'll show you a thing or two, then we'll know that God does want them into our hands."

So they left the matter open. They didn't presumptuously tear into the Philistines because they thought, "God is going to be with us and we're going to wipe them out." There was a certain amount of precaution. If I don't know for sure, a little precaution is always wise. The Bible is full of stories of people who ventured out in faith, giving God an opportunity to do what He intended to do, simply by making themselves available to Him.

Several years ago, we heard that the radio station KWVE was up for sale. At that time we were being broadcast on KYMS. We were actually providing them with the financial funding and visibility needed to get them started. The station president had bought the station in order to bring Christian radio to Orange County. The Word For Today was originally the station's anchor program. But when new ownership took over, they decided to go to a contemporary music format and cut off the Bible teaching programs. So we went on KBRT, but they were extremely expensive.

Then we heard that KWVE was up for sale. We decided, "Let's just make them an offer, and see what the Lord will do. If the Lord wants us to have it, they'll accept the offer and the thing will work out." We gave God a chance to work. We asked God, "Do you want a radio station in Orange County that will broadcast worship music and Bible teaching? Do you desire that?"

There we were, willing to venture out and give God a chance. It was solely an act of faith. We were determined that we weren't going to dicker and negotiate. We were just going to give them a figure. Then

they said, "We have others interested, too." And we said, "Fine." High pressure sales tactics won't work when you're committed to the Lord. We prayed, "Well, Lord if you want it, fine, and if not, that's fine too." Finally, it worked out that they accepted the offer and so we have KWVE today, and it's providing a glorious ministry. Interestingly it is also showing a profit, and yet we charge one third the cost of broadcasting on other religious stations in the area. We can air our ministry partners' programs for a lot less, and give them a good audience. God has blessed KWVE, but it's because we stepped out and said, "God, if this is what you want, we will take the step in faith and make the offer."

But there was also a TV station that came up for sale. We put in an offer on it. We saw it as an opportunity for the Lord to televise what we call "Representative Christianity", instead of the lunatic fringe programming that was so prevalent. Our bid wasn't accepted so we just walked away from it. We didn't push and we didn't get ahead of the Lord. If God wanted us to have it, He would have made it available, and, if not, we weren't going to strive or negotiate. So, stepping out in faith and seeing what God wants to do is what you might call, "testing the waters."

A few years ago we realized that we needed a larger facility for our Bible College, which was located at Twin Peaks Conference Center at the time. Twin Peaks needed the entire conference center to house the school, so we weren't able to continue our regular conferences along with the Bible School. Then a large, beautiful ranch property owned by the Los Angeles Rescue Mission became available in Vista.

We put a deposit on it, but many members of the Vista City Council living near the property started a media drive against us. We decided, "We don't have to fight this", and we backed away from the deal. A realtor, who saw the notice in the paper that we had cancelled the escrow, called us, and said that he happened to have a listing in Murrieta Hot Springs, which had not yet been made public. We went and looked at the property, and we could see the potential there. We made our "low ball" offer on it and said, "If the Lord's in it, we'll get it." And we got it!

The interesting thing, though, is that we'd been wanting the facility next door to Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa for many years. This six-story office building was originally offered to us for \$18 million. A few years ago we made an offer of \$10 million and they said, "No, it's worth more than that." Then a person came forward and put together a deal with the major tenant. The property was then offered to us for \$8.9 million. We went ahead and got it for \$1 million less than we offered! We really saw the hand of the Lord in that.

But the interesting thing is that if we had bought the building next door first, we would never have purchased Murrieta Hot Springs. We wouldn't have been in the position to buy Murrieta. So we can see the hand of God in the whole process. He wanted us to have both of these properties, and He orchestrated the timing in such a way that we were already into Murrieta when the office building became available at a price that was too good to pass up. So here we are now with both pieces of property.

We were taking baby steps, and the Lord wanted us to take a giant step. You just keep going forward, and as long as the Lord opens the door, you just keep moving ahead. There is always a sense of daring in a step of faith. You dare to step out to see what the Lord might want to do. But, again, if God isn't in it, we don't fight Him. We don't press. We don't manipulate. We don't force things. If God's in it, it's going to go His way. It's going to go smoothly, and we're not going to have to make compromises.

When Greg Laurie took over our Monday Night Bible Study, God began to really bless him and the ministry. We saw young people coming forward every Monday night to receive Christ. I called Greg in and said, "Greg, why don't we see if we can get a week this summer at Pacific Amphitheater. Let's get a larger

facility to see what God might do if we had more room. We're overflowing the place on Monday night and we don't have room for everybody. So, why don't we try Pacific Amphitheater?"

That was in April, and Greg didn't think that we had enough time to do it. He said, "You can't do it now!" And I said, "Why not? Let's see if they have a week available. Let's just see what God might want to do with a larger venue."

We called Pacific Amphitheater and they did have a week available in the summer. We decided to call the event "Harvest Crusades." We were absolutely overjoyed because that week was so glorious! The last night they actually had to lock the gates because there were so many people inside. They set up loud speakers outside so the people who couldn't get in could hear. It was a thrill! And it's just grown and developed from there, but it began with only a simple step of faith. "Let's see what God might want to do. Let's give God a chance to work. Let's step out." We might risk a few dollars, but, as the saying goes, "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Another classic Old Testament example of stepping out in faith took place when the city of Samaria was being besieged by the Syrians. The conditions had become so bad in the city of Samaria that they were selling the jaw bone of a donkey for sixty-five pieces of silver and a quarter of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. The women had turned to cannibalism. One woman cried out to the king pleading for help, but he answered, "How can I help you? I don't have food on my own table." She said, "This woman and I made an arrangement to eat our babies, and we boiled my baby and ate it, and now she has hid her baby. So make her produce it so we can eat it." The king tore his clothes and said, "God help me if I don't get the head of that prophet, Elisha!" He was blaming God for his own problems. (II Kings 6:24-33).

Elisha was an interesting kind of a prophet, as well as an interesting man. He had amazing spiritual insight and such a close communion with God that he was surprised when God didn't show him things. Now, every once in a while God has shown me something, but I'm always shocked and surprised when He does. I get excited! It happens only a few times in your life. But Elisha was so tuned in that he was surprised when God didn't show him things. I'm surprised when God does, but he was surprised when God didn't.

Elisha was in his house with his friends when he started talking to himself, "Hmm, wow! Can you beat that." So his friends asked, "What's going on, Elisha?" And he replied, "The king is sending a guy down here to get my head. So, when he knocks on the door, you guys open it and pin him with the door. For, behold! The feet of his master are right behind him." Pretty soon there was a knock on the door. Elisha's friends opened the door, pinned the guy against the door, and held him there. Then the king came riding up with the prime minister and said, "I finally got you! You've troubled Israel long enough." Elisha replied, "I'm not the one who has troubled Israel. You're the one that's troubled Israel by bringing in the worship of Baal. You're the one to blame!"

He went on to say, "Don't worry. Tomorrow by this time, they will be selling a bushel of fine flour in the gates of Samaria for sixty-five cents." The prime minister scoffed at the promise of God saying, "Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (II Kings 7:2). And Elisha said, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." (II Kings 7:19).

Why did the prime minister stagger at the promises of God? Because he tried to figure out, in a human way, how God could do it. Many times, that's when we get into trouble. We can't see how God could do it. We've tried everything and we've plotted every way and we've just had to conclude that it's impossible.

We're prone, just like the prime minister, to say, "If God should open windows of heaven, could such a thing be?" Elisha said, "You'll see it, but you won't eat it." God's going to do His work, but because of your unbelief, you won't be able to benefit or profit from the work of God.

The story continues with four leprous men who lived in the garbage heap outside of the city of Samaria. Because of their leprosy, they weren't allowed to enter the city. They existed on the garbage thrown over the wall, but because of the famine in the city they were starving. One of them looked at the others and said, "Why sit we here until we die?" (II Kings 7:3). "There's no sense in going into the city. So let's go over to the camp of the Syrians. Who can tell, maybe they will have mercy on us and give us a crust of bread that we might live, or maybe they will kill us. But so what? We're going to die anyway." They began a venture in faith that was premised on the sliver of a hope that maybe they would be given a crust of bread, or maybe they wouldn't.

I'm amazed that many churches don't come to this same place, as the few people left look around at each other. I'm surprised they don't say, "Well, why do we just sit here until we die? Let's do something. Maybe it will work, and maybe it won't, but if it doesn't, it doesn't matter, because we're dying anyhow. Let's venture out."

I think of all of the ventures of faith that have been made throughout history on just that kind of a premise. Who knows what God might be wanting to do? Let's step out. Let's find out. Let's give God a chance. The story of Elisha concludes when the Syrians heard noises that they interpreted as the chariots of Egypt. They figured that the king had hired the Egyptians as mercenaries, and panic broke out. They began to flee, and by the time the four lepers came to the first tent, they found that supper was on the table, but no one was there to eat it. So they ate and grabbed all the treasures. They went to the next tent and found the same thing. It was empty of men, but filled with food.

As they were trying to grab the loot, bury it and hide it, one of them said, "Hey, fellows! We'd better let them know in town what God has done. If we just hide this and hoard it for ourselves, mischief will come to us." When they returned to the city, they cried to the guard on the wall, "The camp of the Syrians is empty. There's plenty of food for everybody. Let the king know that people don't need to go to sleep hungry tonight." When the report came to the king, he said, "It's a trap. Those clever Syrians know how hungry we are, so they pulled back into the shadows to wait for us to come pouring out of the city. Then they're going to pounce on us and kill us. Don't let anybody out of the gates of the city. Keep the city gates barred."

I think of the tragedy and the cost of unbelief. It keeps us from partaking even when God has provided abundantly. I have met people that have that kind of mentality. They always say that it's a trap of some kind. It's too good to be true and there has to be a hitch to it. When God is working, they're afraid to venture in.

There's a passage of Scripture that has meant very much to me through the years. It's found in II Chronicles. The fourteenth chapter begins the story of the reign of King Asa over Judah. He was twenty-five years old when he ascended to the throne. Shortly after the beginning of his reign, the Ethiopians invaded the land, joining together with a confederacy of other nations with an army of a million men plus chariots. When Asa received the report of this huge invading army, he prayed unto the Lord and said, "LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." (II Chronicles 14:11).

Now, I like this. He wasn't saying, "God, I have a plan. Now, I want you to bless the plan." He wasn't saying, "Now God, I have it all figured out. Now, bless our program." It wasn't, "God, get on my side." Instead, it was "God, I'm coming on Your side. In Your name we're going to go out against them. Don't let man prevail against You. They aren't going to prevail against me, because I don't have anything. I don't have any power. But, Lord, that doesn't make any difference to You. I'm going to go out in Your name. Don't let them prevail against You. They can beat me, but don't let them beat You."

This is similar to what Jonathan said. God doesn't need a whole army. God can just do it with one man if God is wanting to work. It's what Paul said in Romans 8:31, "If God be for us, who can be against us."

God gave Asa the victory over the Ethiopians. As Asa was coming back, the prophet of the Lord came out to meet him, and the Lord said through the prophet, "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." (II Chronicles 15:2). As he began his reign as king over Judah, Asa received a great word from the Lord. "The Lord will be with you as long as you be with Him. If you seek Him, He will be available. He will be found of you. But, if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."

Under the reign of Asa, the kingdom was prosperous and the people were blessed. But toward the latter part of his reign, when he was wealthy and prosperous and successful, the northern kingdom of Israel decided to invade Judah. They began to build fortified cities north of Jerusalem. They prepared to set up a siege prior to attacking Judah.

When Asa saw them building their fortified cities, he realized what their plan was and took money out of the temple treasury. He sent it to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, to hire the Syrians to attack Israel from the north. The Syrians came down from the Golan Heights and began to attack the northern part of Israel. The king of Israel then had to take the troops that were building the fortified cities and deploy them northward to defend against this attack by the Syrians. As the troops left the fortified cities, the men of Judah went out and dismantled the cities.

Looking at the outcome, it seems that the strategy was successful. It worked. Asa was no doubt smug and enjoying his brilliant strategy. Money can do wonderful things, and he was glorying in what you can do if you have enough money. You can hire the Syrians. They're mercenaries, and you can protect yourself. What a successful strategy!

Hanani the prophet came out to Asa and said to him, "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand." (II Chronicles 16:7-8). When you were little and had no strength and were faced with the invading army of the Ethiopians, you trusted in the Lord and the Lord delivered you. Your trust was in Him. But now that you've grown powerful and strong, you're trusting in your own devices. Don't you know that "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (II Chronicles 16:9). That's the key. The eyes of the Lord are going to and fro throughout the entire earth to find men whose hearts are in harmony with His so that He might show Himself strong in their behalf.

What the prophet is saying is that God wants to work. God has a work that He desires to do, and God is simply looking for people who are in harmony with what He desires in order that He might show Himself strong on their behalf. The key is to discover what it is that God wants to do. I've found that the best way is

by just stepping out. Try it and see. Maybe God will work. Maybe God is wanting to work. Let's give Him a chance. But again, always have the attitude "If it doesn't work, let's not push it." Maintain that flexibility of being able to walk away from a project. If it's obvious that it isn't working, then let's not push it and try and make it work.

We see the same idea in the story of Esther when Mordecai told her to go in and see the king. She said, "You just don't go in and see him. You must be called. You're putting your life on the line to go in if you're not called." Mordecai replied, "You think that if this decree goes through, that you're going to escape? Maybe God has risen you up for such a time as this. If you fail, deliverance will arise in another quarter."

In other words, God's going to do His work. God's going to accomplish His purposes. The nation of Israel can't be wiped out, because it's through them that the Messiah is going to come. You must have the confidence that God's purposes will stand. Though you fail, deliverance will arise from another quarter. God will do the work, but we have the opportunity to be the vessels through which God works. I believe that's often the case. God's got a work that He desires to do. He wants to do it and you can choose to be a participant. You can be the vessel if you dare. With Esther, it was a daring thing to go in uncalled by the king. If he doesn't raise the scepter, she immediately gets killed.

Several years ago there was a book written called, "The Gospel Blimp." It was so typical of the church programs that are devised by men to try to build a church's attendance. It's amazing to see all of the church growth programs, devices, and schemes that people can buy into. The idea was to get this little blimp and to put an invitation to attend the church on the blimp. They then put it on a cable and let it just fly above the church. The idea was to let people know that the church was there. They even put the message, "Jesus Loves You" on the blimp.

The problems that they had keeping that thing up make for a classic story. Finally a storm came and the men were out there trying to hold the thing. They got into a big fight with each other, and it ultimately split the church. Half the people left, angry at the other half. That's so true of man's efforts! Rather than bringing gain to the church, they incurred a loss. Early on, when they saw the thing wasn't working, they said, "Oh, but we spent fifteen hundred dollars for this blimp. We have to keep it up there." They should have said it was a mistake, forgotten it, and let the thing blow away in the wind. Let's not try to hold onto what God is wanting to blow away.

Several years ago I went down to Lubbock, Texas to speak at a Southern Baptist Church. The pastor said they had decided that they weren't going to keep any program alive in the church by artificial means. In other words, they weren't going to put on life support systems and try to keep things alive that were dying.

This is the mistake that the church has so frequently made. There's a time when God uses a particular kind of a program, but then that time passes. Unfortunately, it's become a tradition for people to try to keep it alive. They pump life support systems into it and attempt to keep it going. With God's help we learn to let things die a natural death instead of trying to keep things going by artificial means.

It's always a sign of degeneration when you have to go back to the past to say what God has done, rather than being able to say, "Look at what God is doing today." Instead of just hearing what God has done, it's important that we become a vital part of the work. We need to experience and see the work of God for ourselves. Otherwise, it won't go on. We need to make each succeeding generation a first generation as far as the experience of the work of God is concerned. In that way, it's being continued. But when we build a memorial and start saying, "Look at what God did, and how God used this person. Look at how God has

blessed that man!", be careful. When we build a monument to remind ourselves of what God did in the past, that's always a sad day, because we each need to experience the work of God alive and fresh in our own lives.

There was a time when God was using the Saturday night concerts at Calvary Chapel in just a glorious way. Saturday night concerts were the greatest evangelistic tool that we had going. The place was jammed on Saturday nights. We had a lot of bands and hundreds of kids coming forward to accept Jesus Christ every Saturday night. If you took a poll in Southern California on where people were saved, you'd find that many were saved at a Saturday night concert at Calvary Chapel. There was a time that God was using these concerts, but then that time passed. A couple of years ago, there were some who said that they wanted to try Saturday Night Concerts again. So, I said, "O.K., go for it." But the time had passed. For a while they tried to keep them going, but it was as if God had said, "No, that era is over." Now that doesn't mean that it won't come again sometime, but rather than going on and on and seeing the thing slowly lose its life, it's best to cancel it. Let it go. Let it die. Don't try and keep it going.

So, take a step in faith. If it works, rejoice. If it doesn't, look for something else. Give God the opportunity. I believe strongly in giving God an opportunity, and when it works, glorious! But when it doesn't work, you haven't really gotten that deeply into it so that you can't just walk away and say, "Well, it sure looked like a great idea, didn't it?" Don't lock yourself on to it and get yourself in so deep that you can't walk away.

Be led by the Spirit and don't be afraid to follow. And having begun in the Spirit, don't seek to be made perfect in the flesh. I do see this as a problem, even among some of the guys that were with us at the beginning. God has blessed their ministry, but unfortunately they've gotten much more organized. They're now beginning to direct the program and with it they're losing something that's vital. Having begun in the Spirit, don't seek to be perfected in the flesh. It's always a mistake.

I thank God that He has given us a lot of pastors who caught this vision of simply venturing out in faith. I watch them as they're making these ventures in faith. It's a thrill to see how God is blessing when we dare to step out and allow Him to do what He wants to do, giving ourselves over as instruments through which He can do what He wants to do if He so desires. The key is making ourselves available. So, who knows, the eyes of the Lord are still going to and fro throughout the entire earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards Him. Discover the will of God and then jump into it. Get your heart in harmony with His, and you will be amazed at what God will do and how God will bless.

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