

Bruce Springsteen released the song "Tougher Than The Rest." It is a ballad that simply offers an honest commitment to weather the dark roads ahead. "...if you're rough and ready for love Honey, I'm tougher than the rest." Toughness is a sought-after attribute. To achieve this, like Ben said last week, many of us give many hours a week to getting tough. We lift iron, or study to get academically tough. *Hello Fresh* and *Gusto* help us move from weakness in cooking. *Duolingo* has helped many of us because of our weakness in languages and software programs can help us develop from our weakness in financial budgeting. But what about evangelism and sharing the good news of Jesus? Despite all the books and courses and training on how to answer difficult questions many of us feel evangelistically. weak and ineffective

What if I were to tell you that Jesus sends people out in deliberate weakness, in deliberate dependence! We are dependant on our God, by design so we come to him in prayer. Luke I0:1-2 is what we'd expect but verse 3 knocks you for six. "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." If you're a lamb and there is a wolf about, you need a shepherd. The question is not "are you tough enough to share the gospel?" It is, "are you weak enough"? A lamb cannot go toe to toe with a wolf. You are called to simply share a little news of the Good Shepherd who you know and love. If they ask you questions like "Why does God allow suffering?" You can answer, "God has allowed suffering in my life for his purposes, and he has been with me through it". All of us who trust in Jesus as our Lord go with dependence and diligence.

Dependence (v I-3) "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go." They go out as an extension of Jesus's own ministry. They go as ambassadors, representing Christ and his message as part of discipling, part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We see this in what we call 'The Great Commission'. The church inherits a sent identity. This is a shared responsibility, and privilege. If you are a follower of him, he has appointed you as his ambassador, to go out and proclaim the gospel. Before he gives any further instruction Jesus instructs them to pray. (v 2), "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Prayer is one of the best and most powerful means of helping forward the cause of Christ. J.C. Ryle, the first bishop of Liverpool said, "Not all *believers have money to give to missions. Very few have great intellectual gifts or extensive influence in the world. But all believers can pray for the success of the gospel and they ought to pray for it daily."* We pray that the people of Mold would hear the gospel this Christmas and respond in faith. And we act by inviting a friend or neighbour to Quizmas, by going as a worker into his harvest field. As members here at the church, we are committed to, "Regular private prayer, including for Church Members and the work, ministry and personal Bible study as well as praying for the Elders and Deacons" Mission starts with prayer. We are dependent upon our God so we come to him in prayer.

Focus (v4-8) "Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road;" Jesus isn't telling them to be discourteous but is establishing the priority of their mission over social convention. When we read this, as sent ones of God, we have to ask, do we faff and dither when we ought to be working hard in prayer and evangelism? If we are stationary, then we're falling short of who we are called to be in Christ. We have been told by Christ to GO! The best way to keep a car running is by driving it. Cars are meant to go and if they aren't driven they end up not working. Christians are meant to go! The kingdom of God is near. We don't have time to build our kingdoms of comfort. Life is too short for the world's way of living. We seek a heavenly country, not built with human hands and we want others to seek that too. Are our pockets of easy-street aiding or hindering our mission? After 15 months of adapting our house to the family's needs I have to be careful that it is not taking all my thought-time or practical building time. If our ability to go is being

hindered by Dulux paint or our Caribbean cruise, then let us heed Jesus's call to focus. "Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road."

Jesus tells the 72 to seek out people ready and willing to hear. "If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you." Find a person who responds peaceably to your message of the gospel. Ultimately, they were going on the orders of the Prince of Peace and are proclaiming that the Prince of Peace has come near. When someone comes to faith in Jesus relational harmony with God is restored. At conversion, sin and its cost is taken by Christ and his righteousness is imputed to the new believer. That person is now in Christ. They are now at peace with God for the first time ever. "Peace will rest on them." (v6) But if they reject the gospel, if they do not heed the call for repentance and faith in light of the kingdom of God coming near, if they reject the Prince of Peace, peace will not rest on them. That is what we are bringing when we are sharing the gospel, an offer of peace with God!

As when Jesus sent out the 12, he also instructed them to not move from house to house in case that it showed some preference of one way of treatment over another. There is a dependence that requires faith in God's provision, both for the giver and the beneficiary. The giver needs to have faith in God to give or to provide hospitality and trust their needs will be met. The receiver needs to have faith in God to provide. So that is the focus that Jesus calls us to in evangelism.

Fruit (v9-16) "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you." Here we see an expectation of positive fruit as a sign that the kingdom of God has come near you. The long-awaited, the long-promised, the greatly anticipated Messiah has come. The gospel message is simple. You just need to know Jesus. “I am a sinful man. Jesus died on the cross and took my sin. Now I am free and alive in him. People will repent, believe and be baptised on profession of faith. (v9) But sadly the next six verses are about the rejection of Christ and he who sent him. Part of the reason we feel so weak and ineffective evangelistically is because people's hearts are hard. This does not a surprise Jesus which is why he lamented over the unbelief. The nearness that saves also condemns. "Woe to you, Chorazin [Kor-a-sihn] Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades." (v13-15) This is serious business. There is judgement. Unbelief does not go unpunished forever. Persistent unbelief in the presence of clear revelation exposes a hardened heart and brings greater judgment. This ought to be a warning to us and an incentive for evangelistic activity. Let me urge you, "Today, [as] you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Do not become like concrete. I've heard it said, "No sin makes less noise and none so surely damns the soul, as unbelief." You can sit in church and not believe. You can go to a Bible study and not believe. Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum… they saw Jesus’ miracles! They still didn't believe! You can hop between churches, you can listen to worship music, you can watch spiritual videos on YouTube, you can sit under preaching and still respond with unbelief!

This is no reason to give up, but it is also no reason to heap blame upon ourselves for the seemingly lack of faith a loved one is showing. We must do what we can, both embody the gospel in how we live and share and apply it with what we say, take the opportunities as God gives them. And as we do, let us grieve their unbelief, let us pray that they do believe, but let us not blame ourselves for their unbelief. "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me." He sends us like lambs among wolves, but He went himself as The Lamb. If we trust in Jesus, we will follow Jesus. And if the one we follow suffered, so we ought to expect to suffer. Each of our sufferings will be different. For some it may be rejection, casting out. For some it might be great grief. Others martyrdom. But whatever this world throws at us, we can go rejoicing that we are his. He is ours and we will be with him forever. I love the song 'Tougher Than The Rest,' but I don't wanna sing it and mean it. If God appoints and sends ambassadors who go with diligence and dependence I want to go in dependence. Because we are sent in Christ, we can trust his working in our weakness. So the question is, are you weak enough?