

# NO LOWER CALLING +++

PASTOR MARK ZEHNDER

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Hey, hey, good morning, everybody. Good morning, King of Kings. Yeah, yeah. So, hey, if you're a guest with us this morning, we are absolutely thrilled that you are here celebrating a very important day today as our dear pastor, my friend and colleague, Dr. Roger Timer.

Sharon said be sure to call you doctor. Very few times did that happen. It didn't happen with me very much either, though we have that in common, our doctorates out of Fuller Seminary. But we're here to honor you today. And Cheryl, they're retiring after 30 years here at King of Kings. Come on, people.

Now, it's kind of always weird when we clap because we don't know if we want you gone or if we're just clapping to celebrate. Anyway, so Roger and I actually go way back. We were born only six weeks apart. Our parents went to the same college. So there is some chance that there's a picture out there of me and Roger walking around in our diapers. It's possible.

And I got to thinking, since I retired three years ago and you're retiring today and you just turned 70 and I'll be turning 70 before too long, there's an outside chance there could be another picture of you and me in our diapers. Hope not. Unless we need them, then I guess I hope so.

Now, I've been reflecting on 30 years of shared ministry and a lifetime of friendship. And I've not just been reflecting on those memories, but so what Jesus says about greatness and what Jesus says about leadership. And for that reason, I'm entitling the message for this morning, No Lower Calling.

Before I get there, I mentioned before a picture that we don't have. There is a picture that we do have of Roger at seminary time. Check this out. There he is in all of his seminary glory. Oh man, you were ready to tackle the world, weren't you?

And 30 years ago when Roger and Cheryl came, this is the family that came to us 30 years ago. Look at those. Isn't that pretty? I've been accusing Roger of marrying Cheryl when she was 11 years old, but at any rate.

Now, but what is this No Lower Calling? And that doesn't have much of a ring to it, does it? No Higher Calling. Now that seems more appropriate for a day like today. No Higher Calling, Roger, you and I talked about so many times over the years that what higher calling could there be?

Than to know that God loved us so intensely that he sent his son to die for us. And when he did that and rose from the grave, the Bible says that we, on the basis of that, have been adopted as the very sons and daughters of the Most High God.

And what higher calling can there be to be a son or daughter of God Almighty? And then on top of that for us, he gives us the blessing to be called as pastors, to have an opportunity to provide spiritual care

and love for people, to share the truth of God's Word, and inspire and influence people, not just for this life, but for the life of the world to come.

And so higher calling, that makes sense, but no lower calling? What's up with that? Turns out it's actually one and the same. And I say that based on these words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 20.

Look at them with me. Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons, that's James and John, and kneeling down asked a favor of him. What is it you want? He asked. She said, grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.

You don't know what you're asking, Jesus said to them. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink? We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, you will indeed drink from my cup. This would be the cup of suffering.

But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father. When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.

Jesus called them together and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Isn't it fascinating that the highest calling really becomes the lowest calling? It really is this crazy sort of upside down, counterintuitive, counter-cultural call to be in the kingdom of God, the calling to follow and serve Christ, whether we're pastor or not, whatever the vocation.

It's the radical and serious invitation to find your way to the bottom, to the lowest place. And I have seen, and many of us have seen, Roger and Cheryl, how you have done that so faithfully over all these years.

Though this business of no lower calling can be painful and lonely, yet there are God-breathed and thrilling outcomes. Here's the first. No lower calling leads to no grander vision.

I haven't been able to get over how incredulous it must have been that first day when Jesus came up to the shore of the Sea of Galilee and called out to some smelly fishermen, come, follow me.

And we're told this is what happens. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men. And at once, immediately, like, just like that, they just left their boats and followed him.

Mark goes on a verse later to say the same thing happened with James and John when Jesus called them and says they left their dad Zebedee in the boat and took off.

And my question is, how did that happen? Why did that happen? These men would have had no earthly idea what it was going to mean to leave their occupation and leave their family to follow this stranger.

It must have been something in his voice. There must have been something in this call that they understood that their life was going to be expanded in a way otherwise it could not have been.

They received no grander vision. And when you and I, like them, hear the voice of the Son of God calling us to come after him, man, oh man, we get a compelling and a grand vision.

When you sign up for this lower calling business, God changes the way you see your world. You see way more than others who are not in this camp. You get a grander vision that ends up shaping your ministry and your life.

And we've had a 30-year perspective on that, Roger and Cheryl, for your ministry. It started here when you first arrived and helped us see children differently, not just to see little children as the little people that get up on the laps of adults and we bless them, bless them, bless them—not that that's a bad thing—but that children and kids are ministers too, that they're not just the church of the future, they are most certainly the church of today.

And you helped us see that. And when God blessed that here at King of Kings, you weren't satisfied with keeping that here. Your grander vision was to see that it would go out into all this, the United States of America, and even beyond into the world.

It's what kept you up at night and woke you up early in the morning, this grander vision, this reality that God, who rescued us from sin and death and its penalty, then invites us to participate with him in reaching other people with the gospel of Jesus.

I don't know, is there anybody else's mind, any other people that mind isn't blown by that possibility that Jesus asks us and invites us to be in on his mission with him?

Especially when you consider the Bible says that we at one time were spiritually blind and dead and enemies of God, but the grace of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, bringing us to faith, changed everything.

And it's one thing for me to grasp how great is the love of God that Jesus would die for me and save me from my sin, but on top of that, not only would he save me from my sin, but save me for the salvation of others.

And we watched as you lived that life out, Pastor Roger and Cheryl. I'm guessing that in the 30 years that I was here as pastor, I probably shared a common vision that Roger and I had, I don't know, maybe a dozen times over those years.

And it would always be when I was talking about heaven and about when Jesus comes back. And when I was like sort of dreaming and imagining how wonderful it would be, how wonderful it will be when we're living in this existence where there's no separation between earth and heaven, but there's one kingdom, Jesus coming back and bringing that to fruition and restoring and remaking and redoing and renewing all things where there's no sin and there's no death and there's no sadness and there's no tragedies and living in that beautiful, perfect state with Jesus.

And the fact that that goes into eternity, that one day after a day, like there's never an end to the days when we're going to celebrate.

And in my mind, I always pictured that since there are no end of the days, that certainly one day Jesus could announce the night before, hey, everybody, tomorrow is King of Kings Omaha Day. We're going to celebrate King of Kings Omaha tomorrow here.

And we'd all show up. Jesus would look at the family of God called King of Kings Omaha, and now Fremont, and now Northwest, and who knows how many other places along the way.

And he would say, you know, there were many churches that bore my name, but you were different. You were courageous. You were willing to step out way outside the box. You were different.

And he might on that day look and say, you know what, there were many pastors who just went through the motions. There were many pastors that didn't really care all that much about reaching new people for Jesus. They just wanted to kind of stay where they were and take care of themselves and our own little flock.

But Roger Tymer, that was not you. You were different.

Here's the best part of the vision. Then Jesus pulls back the curtain of heaven, and behind it are people of every tribe and nation and race.

And we begin to see the faces of some of those people. And they begin to tell their stories from, oh, way back in 1999, when this white guy from America came over here.

And Roger, because you so often and Cheryl took the lowest place, there are going to be people that are going to say, I'm here because of you.

Oh, that God would give us a grander vision.

Now, those of you that are new to us would have no idea about what I'm about to say. And even those of you that were here for all those years, 30 years, who may not have been involved in kids ministry, once upon a time, Roger got the idea that there wasn't a good enough children's curriculum out there anywhere.

So he just decided, I'll write one. And he was Cheryl, and a team of writers began to write what became an award-winning children's curriculum that not only was here in the United States, but went all over the world.

And when the number of pages were counted, well, let me show you a picture of it, Roger in his office. See all those files, those binders, white and red and green and blue and yellow and with dots on them, that all means something.

What it means inside is that there were over 10,000 pages of curriculum that these guys wrote. That's amazing to me.

But that number isn't significant compared to the number I'm about to show you. Actually, I'm not going to show you the number. I'm going to show you the names of the countries where these resources got to.

They're just going to start scrolling behind me. And I just want you to take the time to look at where in this world all of those materials went, touching the lives of children and adults.

I have to keep talking because the list keeps going. I mean, I don't have anything more to say on this point other than, can you believe it? I mean, look at that. Look at that.

God used you to bring about a grand vision here at King of Kings.

Second outcome of no lower calling living is that it becomes the evidence of no greater love.

It really does. Roger, you talked about this last Sunday in your final sermon here. You talked about the fact that we can't love well unless or until first we are well loved.

That we love because Jesus first loved us. That we can't throw our arms around unlovable people unless or until we have felt the embrace of Jesus loving and forgiving arms around us.

Jesus said, greater love has no one had than this, that he lay his life down for his friends.

Jesus didn't just say it. He did it. He literally laid down his life. He would be crucified, his beaten body nailed to a tree.

Thank the Lord, Roger and Cheryl, you have not had to do that literally.

But figuratively, I've seen over and over and over and over again, how you've laid down your own wishes and your own preferences for the benefit of others.

You exuded this greater love of Jesus to so many, and especially to kids.

Some years ago, we got a call around 11 o'clock at night. This call came in from my daughter. She said something like, dad, it's okay. It's okay, dad.

When you have a conversation that starts like that, you know that the next thing that's coming isn't good.

It's okay, dad, but our house is on fire. We need to bring the kids over.

So they brought the little grandkids over.

I went back over to their house and stood on the curb with Peter and watched our house burn.

In the days and weeks after that, there was occasion for us to have our grandkids at our house as they're trying to put their lives back together.

I remember there were mornings that I would wake up before the kids would wake up, and I'd sneak into their rooms.

I'd go, and I don't want to wake them up. They just looked so peaceful and tender.

They're not that way anymore. They're older now. Beautiful and precious.

I remember just rubbing their hair and saying over and over, whispering, I love you. I love you. I love you.

Because I thought, you know, if things had gone a different direction, I might not have them.

And I was so thankful to God that I had them and they were okay.

I love you. I love you.

And in my heart of hearts, what I wish for every one of you in this moment or in a moment, sometime to come this week, is that you would be in such a quiet place.

Their soul would be so quiet that you could hear the whisper of the Heavenly Father saying that to you, I love you. I love you. I love you.

And if you can't hear the Father's whisper, then I would say, then just look at the concrete evidence and proof and demonstration of His love that He sent His only Son, that He loved the world and He loved you so much that He sacrificed His only Son and that Jesus came and laid down His life and took the lowest place so that you could have life now and forever.

Oh my.

And no greater love.

Lastly, no lower calling leads to no higher joy.

No grander vision, no greater love, and no higher joy.

Joy unspeakable that can't be taken away.

I got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

Remember the one little girl that the pastor was saying, it looks like you got the joy, joy, joy down in your heart.

And she said, well, it's not down in my heart.

Oh no, what?

Oh no.

See, I'm doing this impromptu and I forget.

Remember the one about, oh, it sounds like Jesus is in your heart.

Uh, well, no, he's, he's, he's in my, I'm going to give you the punchline.

Barney's on my underwear.

I, I don't even, I know how we get there. Just fill in the, fill in the gaps.

It's a great, it's a great joke when it works.

But anyway, taking the lowest place allows you to take people to the higher joy of mountaintops.

When you take the low place, you take them to the highest place.

Roger, you had one mountaintop experience yourself.

I, I'm so impressed.

I, I am pretty sure no one in this room right now could raise their hand to this question and answer.  
Yes.

Have you ever climbed Mount Kilimanjaro?

Anybody?

I don't, I don't see, I don't see a hand going up.

Can you raise your hand, Roger?

Yeah, you did that.

Here's a, here's a picture.

Here's proof of it.

There is Roger and his buddy Rob Meyer standing at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Now, for those of you that are part of the band of brothers that do the, the peak challenge every year, and you go climb some 14, 14K, you know, that's impressive.

That is impressive.

I, I've never done that.

Mount Kilimanjaro is 19K, is 19,341 feet above sea level.

That's incredible.

What an accomplishment.

But honestly, I think that pales in significance to the tops of spiritual mountains that you took children to and adults for that matter.

I was thinking back just of all those years of vacation Bible school here and Roger, how many of you remember Roger creating what was called the Ponginator?

Remember the Ponginator?

It has a motor and PVC pipe and he'd just shoot stuff out of it.

Incredible.

I remember he and Mike Hines up here on the rafters like swinging like Tarzan during one of those VBSs.

I remember Roger getting all slimed up and everything else for the one single reason to be able to take children to the top of a mountain where they would find a Savior that loves them so desperately.

To be Jesus followers sent to those who are looking for a reason to live and helping them find it, to see the sparkle in the eye of a child when they first grasp the reality of God's love for them, there's no higher joy.

Several years ago, I was sitting on an airplane.

We were getting ready to take off.

It was one of those really small things where there's just two seats on either side and the plane was full except for maybe one or two empty seats.

I'm in 6B and right before we're ready to take off, they're ready to close the door, 6A is still empty.

It's not like I'm not social or anything like that, but the idea of sitting like this for two hours is I'm not fond of, so I was pretty excited that 6A was empty.

Then I heard the flight attendant speaking to someone that was behind the bulkhead.

I couldn't see this person, and the flight attendant said something like this, Now, Harley, what we're going to do is I'm going to take you onto the plane.



You are seated in seat 6A, and I want you to stay there until everybody gets, when the plane lands, everybody's going to get off the plane, and I'm going to come and get you, and then I'm going to take you off the plane, okay?

Now, I'm listening to this conversation thinking, well, at least this is going to be a small person sitting next to me.

I kind of pictured a third grader, and then around the wall came a gentleman.

How many of you remember Lurch from the Addams Family?

Younger folks who've not seen any reruns of that, just check it out.

This guy was Lurch.

This guy, Harley, he was like, he was 6'8", 300 pounds, probably 50 years old, and clearly Harley had some mental challenges.

So he sat, I got out, he sat down in 6A.

I looked at what was remaining of 6B, my seat, there wasn't anything there.

Like, I don't know how, I can't even tell you what I was thinking at that moment.

I wouldn't want to tell you what I was thinking at that moment.

So anyway, I got my left cheek kind of halfway in there, and sat, the rest of me was out in the aisle, and Harley immediately looks like he's having a problem with his seatbelt.

So I said, Harley, you want me to, want me to help?

He looked at me like I was his long-lost friend.

Shortly after, he learned my name.

He said, Mark, do they have water on this plane?

I said, yeah, they got, Harley, they got water, they got pop, they got juice.

He said, is it free?

I said, yeah, it's free.

He was like, ecstatic.

A moment later, we start down the runway, and we're starting to accelerate.

Harley's looking out the window with this huge smile on his face.

He jabs me like this.

He says, Mark, we're about to have the slingshot effect.

It's so fun.

There was a dad and his three-year-old behind me.

The three-year-old was on his maiden voyage, and the thrill of that little boy could not match what was going on in Harley.

Though, as I found out later, he'd made many flights, he was still having the time of his life.

When the plane landed about two hours later, after two hours of non-stop conversation, I'm getting off the plane, honestly a bit worn out, and Harley looked at me and said, Mark, thanks for spending time with me.

I'm thinking, I didn't, I didn't really have any choice, but...

And then he says, Mark, you have a great life, okay?

Now, with tears welling up, I said back, Harley, you have a great life, too.

I hope you know how much God loves you, and I pray for him to bless you.

You know what I saw in Harley?

He had the most amazing capacity for joy.

He had the most amazing capacity for joy.

Honestly, I don't know what the source of that joy was for Harley, but I know what it is for us, and I know what it is for you.

It's the grace of God, love of God, and the call of God to be one of his very own.

No lower calling, no grander vision, no greater love, no higher joy.

I have one final picture of Roger that I think epitomizes his life and ministry.

Check it out.

That is you.

You are the great adventure.

All the stories you've told, maybe we'll hear some of those stories later on tonight out of Soaring Wings.

I hope we do, but Roger has been the great adventure, and you have taken us on an adventure.

But the greatest one is still ahead.

It's not retirement.

It's what you talked about last week.

It's the new heaven and the new earth when Jesus returns.

It's not the adventure of a lifetime.

It's the adventure of eternity where the joy never ends, the love is intensely beautiful, and that vision is beyond description.

So Sharon and I are excited to spend as many retirement years as possible with you and Cheryl, but we're most excited for what lies ahead when we're face-to-face with Jesus.

Roger, Cheryl Tymer, thank you from the bottom of my and our hearts.

We love you, and may God bless your life.