

ARE YOU POISED FOR THE HIGH JUMP?

When someone says "Jump!", do you quickly respond, "How high?" It probably depends on who is giving the order. That loaded little exchange typically signifies that the one giving the order has total authority and expects slavish obedience -- think of a drill sergeant, a heavy-handed boss, or a "Because I said so!" father. The imbalance of power prompts the underling's hasty obedience, with no other questions asked and certainly no love lost. It is an onerous, oppressive dynamic. But within the framework of Christianity, there is a whole different picture.

Despite what some people think, God is not a commandant expecting us to snap to attention in response to his constricting list of "thou shalt nots." The full counsel of the Bible reveals quite the opposite: that although God does have absolute authority, He foists nothing on us. On the contrary, the life to which He lovingly beckons us brings abundant freedom, and our eager willingness to do what He commands brings unparalleled blessing and adventure.

In all eras, God calls people to follow Him and walk in his ways for their own good. For example, in the Old Testament God lays out the blessings He has in store for those who return to Him and freely choose to keep his commandments: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil...Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days" (Deuteronomy 30:1-10, 15-20).

In the New Testament we see Jesus, the human embodiment of that divine life, continuing to underscore God's loving commandments,

distilled as: love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–40).

As we do this day to day, there will be times when we will sense God saying, "Jump!", not as a harsh taskmaster, but as a loving father who urges his child to trust him and jump into his arms from the edge of the dock. The initial jump is the reasoned leap of faith from disbelief or doubt to belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

After that, we will hear "Jump!" as He asks us to do and say things, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The best response is, "How high?", not said as a browbeaten slave but as an enthusiastic servant. We see this occur many times in the Bible.

For example, when Mary is asked to become the mother of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, she immediately says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." By trusting God's call, she jumped into a life beyond her imagination (Luke 1:35–38).

During his earthly ministry, Jesus said "Jump!" in many varied ways, including "Follow me", "Fill the water jars", "Rise and walk", "Bring me the donkey", "Go to Jerusalem and wait." Prompt obedience to each of these requests blessed both the individual and the world around them.

So how about us? How do we respond when God speaks, asking us to do something unexpected? Do we willingly change our plan for the day? Stop and speak to the stranger? Come aside to pray? Give the donation? Leave our "nets" behind?

Or do we delay, get bogged down amid the pros and cons, dismiss the seemingly odd instruction, decline the step outside of our comfort zone? If we do that, God will not give up on us, punish us, or scold us.

He will not love us any less. But the more readily we respond to his prompts with trust and enthusiasm, the richer our life with Him will be.

So let's pray that the next time we sense God saying, "Jump!", we will respond readily with an eager, "How high?" We will find that we land right in his everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 41:9-10).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux