

WPC
Rev. Ken Sunoo
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Here am I; send me!
Isaiah 6:1-8

January and February are the toughest months of the year for me. Having grown up in California, I'm still surprised that it's already February and spring hasn't arrived yet. I don't mind December with its beautiful Christmas lights, but now those lights are long gone, and there seems to be no end to the cold days and dark nights.

This sense of gloom is the way the people of Israel are feeling during the time of the prophet Isaiah in Jerusalem, as they're beginning to fall under the shadow of Assyrian domination. It's a time of fear and uncertainty. In the face of this threat, Isaiah tells of God as being exalted, powerful, and the ruler of the universe. He shares a stunning vision where he is face-to-face with the living God. Here, the LORD is so magnificent that "the hem of God's robe fills the temple (verse 1)." One professor at Princeton Seminary compares the scale with walking into the National Cathedral and seeing a giant toe.

And how does Isaiah respond? "Here am I; send me!"

When we read the Bible, it's not enough that we agree with it. We also need to obey – Scripture demands response, so that, like Isaiah, we can cry out, “Here am I; send me!”

But that's the tricky part of being a Christian. If we're honest, we admit that the problem with the Bible is not that so much of it is old or obscure; it's rather that what the Bible urges us to do is often not easy. I believe it was G.K. Chesterton who said, “It is not that we have tried Christianity and found it incomprehensible. The problem is that we tried Christianity and found it difficult!”

William Willimon notes, “Our problem is not that there are vast portions of scripture that we don't understand; our problem is that there are many portions of scripture that we understand all too well! We know that these verses demand transformation, change, detoxification, and conversion – and that can be painful.”¹

I think that's why it's so striking when we see someone actually take the words of scripture to heart. Let me share with you a story that shows what this can look like:

One day in 2006, Kevin Salwen, a writer and entrepreneur in Atlanta, and his wife, Joan, were driving their 14-year-old daughter, Hannah, home

¹ William Willimon, [Pulpit Resource](#), 2/7/10, p. 27.

from a sleepover. Stopping for a red light, Hannah noticed a Mercedes coupe on one side of the street and a homeless man begging for food on the other side. A thought suddenly struck her, and she said, "If that man had a less nice car, that man there could have a meal."

After the light changed, Hannah pursued the topic, pushing her parents about inequity and insisting that she wanted to do something personally. Finally, her mother, thinking to bring Hannah back to reality, asked, "What do you want to do? Sell our house?"

Wrong question for an idealistic teen.

Hannah leaped on that idea, urging her parents to sell their luxurious home and give half the proceeds to charity. They could buy a more modest home with the other half, she said.

Kevin acknowledges that they were fairly well off, "a result of hard work, good education and career luck," he says. And at the time, the family of four, including Hannah's younger brother, Joseph, were living in an attractive, spacious, three-story home.

Hannah wasn't deterred, and in the days ahead, she continued to promote the idea and finally got the rest of her family on board. The Salwens sold their home and moved into one that was half the size and, significantly, half the price of the one they sold. They ended up giving

\$800,000 to the Hunger Project, a New York City-based international development organization, where it's being used to sponsor health, microfinancing, food and other programs for some 40 villages in Ghana.

The whole process brought the family closer together. They researched charities to find the right one to receive their gift. Along the way, they participated in World Vision's 30-Hour Famine to learn what it was like to be hungry. They worked together at a local food bank and soup kitchen, and they labored on a team helping Habitat for Humanity build homes. They even traveled to Ghana with Hunger Project executive John Coonrod. The Salwens discovered that Coonrod and his wife donate so much back to the project from their modest aid-worker salaries that they're among the top Hunger Project givers from New York.

But the family came together in another way as well. Kevin says that in the larger house, the family scattered in different directions, but after the downsizing, with less space to scatter to, the family members spend more time in proximity to one another. Unexpectedly, the smaller house turned out to be more family-friendly. "We essentially traded stuff for togetherness and connectedness," Kevin says.

The family who purchased the home the Salwens sold were so impressed with what the family was doing that they gave \$100,000 to the same project.

The Salwens haven't been without critics. Some have called them sanctimonious showoffs, and others have said they should be helping Americans instead of people in Ghana.

Kevin and Hannah have written a book about the whole experience. Titled The Power of Half, it's due to be released in February. Their aim, the father and daughter say, isn't to encourage others to sell their homes but rather to urge them to step off the treadmill of accumulation and define themselves more by what they give than by what they possess.

Hannah, now 17 and planning to become a nurse, says, "Everyone has too much of something, whether it's time, talent or treasure. Everyone does have their own half; you just have to find it."²

I don't know if the Salwen family is Christian, but they sure do act like Christians. The point, as Kevin and Hannah said, is not so much to encourage others to sell their homes (though that's not a bad idea), but to act, to do something to put our faith into action.

² *The Wired Word* for January 31, 2010

That's what Brad Smith did back in 1990 when he started the Souper Bowl of Caring movement with a simple prayer: "Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those who are without a bowl of soup to eat." That's what our youth are doing when they go on their summer mission trip. God desires a response from us: Here am I; send me.

The church at our best is when "we gather, submit to scripture, listen, and align our lives accordingly. In such reading and hearing, God's Word has its way with us. We are being saved, being formed into God's people, being made disciples."³

May God's Word truly be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Amen.

³ Willimon, p. 28.