

Series: "GAME ON!"

Scriptures: John 17:18; Joshua 3:5, 24:15; I Corinthians 9:25; II Timothy 2:4; I Peter 4:1-2; Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 3:23; Acts 1:8; Romans 6:11; Isaiah 6:8

Message Title: "It's Time to Ask God to Use Me"

Introduction: How we doing, BMZ?!? TODAY, we are KICKING OFF a NEW series called, "GAME ON!" BECAUSE ... it is TIME to CHANGE our World! So, in this series, we are going to talk about HOW God wants to use YOU to make a DIFFERENCE in this World. And, I hope that gets us all a bit excited ... BECAUSE, the truth is, there is something in ALL of us that makes us want TEAM UP with OTHER PEOPLE to MAKE a DIFFERENCE ... to CONTRIBUTE ... to make the WORLD a better place!

I think that's one of the reasons we like SPORTS. We like to WATCH sports or participate, because it's great to be a part of something that we KNOW we COULD NOT DO ON OUR OWN!

Okay, with a SHOW of HANDS ... How many of you PLAYED SPORTS when you were younger / when you were a KID?!

Yep. Me too! I loved playing ball as a kid. Football, baseball, basketball, volleyball, tennis, whatever! BUT, my first experience playing ORGANIZED SPORTS, was Little League Baseball up in Neenah Wisconsin. I played for "Neenah Police". And, we were a really GOOD TEAM! My first year, I was one of the youngest players on the team, so I spent a LOT of TIME on the BENCH! I would get in the game in the 5th or 6th inning after the OLDER kids on the team had BUILT a LEAD.

Many of us deal with that. We have a desire to be IN the GAME. We want to participate, but we get PUT on the SIDELINES. Sometimes in sports, that happens ... and there were times that it was BETTER for the TEAM for ME to be on the BENCH!

BUT, when it comes to GOD, he DOES NOT want you to be on the BENCH. God wants to USE YOU right now ... at YOUR skill level! You were created BY God and FOR God and God created you for a PURPOSE!

This SERIES, "GAME ON" is going to remind us that it is TIME to get in the GAME!

If you have your Bible with you, turn with me to **JOHN 17** ... if you don't; no worries. All of our Scriptures for today will be up on the screen and much of what we are doing is in your program. Speaking of which...

*If you haven't already, I invite you to take out your **message notes** and **Connection card**... On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will find a brief outline walking us through our Scripture. You will see that there are blanks to fill in ... Please take the time to do so. **Grab a pen** and write down whatever else you think is important to you and your faith journey. After worship, drop off your CONNECTION CARD and take your notes home and refrigerate them. Please Re-read the Scripture and the notes to keep growing and learning. For those of you watching on-line, hit the button for notes and for CONNECTION CARD and stick with us. If you are watching/listening later, or IPODing; you can download the outline off of our website so you too can take notes.*

Let's pray and then we will press on with where we are going today... **LET'S PRAY (turn off marked lights during prayer)!**

Alright, the idea is that GOD wants us to GET in the GAME and SERVE God's KINGDOM! Well, where does that come from?? How do we KNOW that GOD wants to USE US?! Glad you ASKED!! Let's go to our MEMORY VERSE for today and for this entire SERIES ... it's from John 17. It's where JESUS is praying for You and Me ... 2,000 years ago!!

Here it is ... Let's read this out loud TOGETHER. Ready? John 17:18 = ¹⁸ *Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.* ¹ Wait! Stay right there with that verse.

Listen to the PROGRESSION of this part of JESUS' PRAYER ... Jesus is praying to His Father. He starts with, *"Father, I understand that you 'sent me into the world' for a PURPOSE! You send me on a MISSION ... to Live, to Teach and to Die for the Sins of ALL PEOPLE on a CROSS and then to be RESURRECTED BACK to LIFE! Father God, I will FULFILL MY MISSION."*

And, we know that JESUS DID fulfill His MISSION. BUT, Jesus does NOT stop there. He goes on to say, "In the SAME WAY, I am sending THEM..." Would you please CIRCLE the word "THEM"? Who is "THEM"? It's ME. It's YOU! As Jesus prayed, He certainly had his DISCIPLES in mind that walked with him then. BUT, Jesus prayer is for ANYONE who would follow JESUS at ANY TIME throughout history. That includes US!

Jesus prayed that YOU would get in the GAME! The problem is NOT that God doesn't want to use me or doesn't have a PURPOSE for me or YOU ... the PROBLEM is that when Jesus calls YOUR NAME and says, "YOU'RE UP", we say, "WHO? ME?!? I'm more COMFORTABLE here on the BENCH, thank you. Why don't you put SOMEONE ELSE IN?! Put someone in that is BETTER than me. Put someone in that has LESS BAGGAGE. Put someone in who is more PURE than me."

This happens in CHURCH all of the time! A lot of CHURCHES are like major FOOTBALL STADIUMS. 22 PLAYERS on the field in desperate need of REST and 80,000 SPECTATORS in desperate need of EXERCISE! In churches, you often have a FEW PEOPLE who are IN the GAME! They are working for God's Kingdom and allowing God to USE THEM for a great PURPOSE ... they are BLESSED and have MEANING in their lives.

The MAJORITY of people in churches are still sitting in the STANDS or on the SIDELINES. And, Jesus prayed that this would NOT be the case. Jesus PRAYED that you and I would ALL be USED. AND, at the END of our TIME TODAY, I'm going to invite you to PRAY a 3-WORD PRAYER with me ... "God, USE ME."

BEFORE we can get to THAT PRAYER at the END of our TIME TODAY, we need to work on what it means to pray a prayer like that. If you LOOK in your NOTES, the NEXT SECTION says: **BEFORE I ASK GOD TO USE ME, I MUST:**

Are you with me? So, BEFORE I can pray, "GOD USE ME", we need to go through a BIBLICAL process that we need to use... Here we GO: #1 =

1. PURIFY MY HEART

If you've ever been involved in ATHLETICS, you understand how important the HEART IS. There are many athletes with GREAT ABILITY that NEVER amount to much in the ARENA ... BECAUSE, their HEARTS are NOT in it! That works the OTHER way too! There are ATHLETES who have MADE IT BIG, NOT because they had great TALENT, but because they had GREAT HEART!

When it comes to being USED by God, we have to have our HEART in it! And, that is the FIRST PROBLEM ... many people have a hard time praying, "GOD USE ME" and it's not because they don't want to be used ... it's because they DON'T feel WORTHY! People want to be used by GOD, but they think they are NOT GOOD ENOUGH! *"God, I'm such a SINNER. You know how badly I've MESSED UP in life. Surely, God, you CAN'T USE ME!"*

You know what?! You are RIGHT! You've messed up. I've messed up. You're a SINNER. I'm a SINNER! I'm NOT WORTHY to be USED by GOD. NONE OF US ARE!

BUT, here is the COOL THING ... God can make us worthy... God can PURIFY US and OFFERS to DO THAT every day! God WANTS to PURIFY US for SERVICE! God says, *“I’ll take you and MAKE YOU WORTHY ... just ASK ... just ALLOW ME TO!”*

Here is an example from the Old Testament ... General Joshua stands before God’s people and tells them to PURIFY YOURSELVES ... Joshua 3:5 = ⁵ *Then Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you.”* ² Well, how do I PURIFY MYSELF?? In our day, we can CLAIM GOD’S FORGIVENESS through Jesus on a Cross! We ask for forgiveness and ADMIT we NEED JESUS for that to happen! *“God, I’m NOT worthy, but because of JESUS, YOU make me worthy!”*

Listen, I DON’T want YOU to MISS out! God has a HISTORY of USING IMPERFECT PEOPLE and HE’S NOT going to STOP at YOU! God LOVES IMPERFECT PEOPLE and loves when they come to HIM and ask, *“God, will you PURIFY MY HEART??”* When we put our HEART INTO IT, the answer is always, *“YES!”* And, starting RIGHT AWAY (tomorrow) the Lord will do WONDERS AMONG YOU. #1 = Purify my heart ... #2 =

2. **DEDICATE MY BODY**

See, being used by God not only requires your heart, but it also requires your BODY! After we purify our hearts, we say, *“God, I give you my BODY!”* Much like an ATHLETE DISCIPLINES their body, being used by God often requires PHYSICAL EFFORT. We might have to SWEAT a bit.

It doesn’t mean that you have to run a 4.5 40 yard dash. Thank goodness. It doesn’t mean that you have to run a marathon. Thank goodness! But being USED by GOD does require us to take ACTION. Athletes use their bodies for a temporary purpose (Olympic athletes) ... God want to use our bodies for an ETERNAL PURPOSE ... I Corinthians 9:25 = ²⁵ *All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.*³

Okay, let me be straight-forward with you ... some people are NOT USED by GOD because they are just plain LAZY! They would rather sit on the SIDELINES of in the STANDS and say, *“Let somebody else be used. Let somebody else sweat. I don’t want to get in the game ... I’m not going to show up.”*

I hope you are not that person. I hope you are a person who is ready to say, *“God, I dedicate my BODY and my ENERGY to YOU! I want to be USED to make a DIFFERENCE.”*

And, that gets us to #3 =

3. **SIMPLIFY MY SCHEDULE**

One of the reasons that we don’t have the ENERGY or are not willing to SWEAT to SERVE GOD is that we are just plain WORN OUT because of our SCHEDULE. We are TOO BUSY. In order to be USED by GOD, we might have to let a couple of other things go...

God can use IMPERFECT people. God can use a person with LIMITED PHYSICAL ABILITY. God CANNOT use a person who is OVER-SCHEDULED. Often, we schedule GOD right out of our lives... I UNDERSTAND THIS. It is challenging for ME and SARAH too!

Sarah and I have to say “NO” to things on Sunday mornings too! SPORTS for our KIDS ... We told our girls that if the SOFTBALL / BASKETBALL / VOLLEYBALL Tournament was on Sunday, they would NOT GO until AFTER worship. So, they often sat in 7:30 WORSHIP in their UNIFORMS!

² Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jos 3:5). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

³ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (1 Co 9:25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

I'm amazed at HOW MANY PARENTS will put SPORTS BEFORE their FAITH. It's an EPIDEMIC ... and SATAN is having a FIELD DAY! Convincing parents that their CHILD will someday be a STAR ATHLETE and go on to MAKE MILLIONS ... IF, they will just put SPORTS ahead of WORSHIP! I just think it's more important for parents to INSTILL in their KIDS that SERVING GOD is WAY MORE rewarding ... and it LASTS a LOT LONGER TOO! Remember I Corinthians ... Athletic prizes "FADE AWAY".

I understand. It's hard. BUT, I've learned over the years that sometimes we have to say "NO" to some GOOD THINGS in order to say "YES" to GOD'S BEST THINGS. Here's how Paul addressed it in his letter to Timothy ... II Timothy 2:4 = ⁴ *Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them.* ⁴

As a CHRIST-SOLDIER, do not get too caught up in the affairs of this life. Here's what I've learned ... YOU ALWAYS HAVE TIME TO DO GOD'S WILL! If you are over-scheduled and don't have time for God to use you, you are doing something outside of God's will for your life!

Maybe you need to say "NO" to some good things and "YES" to God's BEST for your life. PRAY, "God, help me to simplify my schedule. Help me to leave room for WORSHIP and GROWTH GROUPS and SERVING in YOUR CHURCH." God will show you when to say "YES" and when to say "NO"... Purify my HEART. Dedicate my BODY. Simplify my SCHEDULE ... then ... #4 =

4. FORTIFY MY FAITH

Like we said last month ... FAITH GROWS when we GO THROUGH STUFF! It doesn't GROW just because we ASK. Listen, if you ASK for MORE FAITH, God will put some things in front of you where you HAVE TO TRUST GOD! Faith comes through PRACTICE. Courage from GOD comes from DAILY HABITS of FAITH! That is HOW we FORTIFY our FAITH. Listen to Peter ... I Peter 4:1-2 = *So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin.** ² *You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God.* ⁵

According to our BIBLES, we probably need to SUFFER SOME in order to GAIN in FAITH and be USABLE by GOD. IT comes OUTSIDE of our COMFORT ZONE!

Listen, here is what's going to happen ... Your enemy, Satan, is going to start whispering in your ear ... "Who are you to pray, 'God use me'? Look what all you've done ... what all you've messed up in your life ... you are a nobody..." See the devil / evil wants to SNUFF out your FAITH. BUT, GOD wants you to get STRONGER! God wants to use IMPERFECT PEOPLE who PURIFY themselves. God wants to give you STRENGTH to dedicate your BODY. God wants to give you WISDOM to simplify your SCHEDULE. God wants to build your TRUST in HIM even outside of your COMFORT ZONE.

So, as we head into HOW GOD wants to USE YOU/ME ... let me start with this: God will take you OUT of your COMFORT ZONE, but NOT OUTSIDE of what you were MADE FOR. God USES US according to our PERSONALITY and our GIFTEDNESS (He made us!).

HOW DOES GOD WANT TO USE ME?

1. IN MY FAMILY

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (2 Ti 2:4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (1 Pe 4:1-2). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Think for just a moment about those people who are the CLOSEST to you. Think about your PARENTS, your SPOUSE, your KIDS, GRANDKIDS, SIBLINGS, etc. Think about those who are NOT BLOOD relatives, but they are FAMILY. Understand that God wants to use you in the FAMILY that God PLACED you IN!

Listen, I know it's hard because I have CRAZY COUSINS just like you do! There are some relatives that I've shared faith with and we are making PROGRESS. Others, NOT SO MUCH! They just think that I'M CRAZY! BUT, what is the ALTERNATIVE?! *"God, please DON'T USE ME in my family... I don't CARE about them ENOUGH to INVITE them to KNOW YOU and have YOUR BEST in their lives!"*

I hope we will be more like JOSHUA when it comes to our families ... Joshua 24:15 = ¹⁵ *But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.*" ⁶ Think about this ... ANYONE or ANYTHING that you put AHEAD of GOD in your family ... even if GOD is #2 ... is NOW the GOD of your FAMILY! Sports? Money? Even FAMILY!

See, this is strange, but some people make their FAMILY their god! They will do anything for their KIDS or GRANDKIDS or RELATIVES, accept TEACH and/or SET the EXAMPLE to "SEEK FIRST GOD'S KINGDOM"! And we have kids GROW UP thinking that LIFE is ALL ABOUT THEM! See, when family becomes GOD ... that's a PROBLEM!

So, God wants to USE YOU in YOUR FAMILY ... then God extends that to our Church Family...

2. IN MY CHURCH

God wants to USE ME in my CHURCH (not the building ... as part of a MOVEMENT of PEOPLE)! Hey, I'm going to do more on this next week, but when God brings you into FAITH and you become a CHRISTIAN by YOUR CHOICE and GOD'S WORK through JESUS, God IGNITES in you what the Bible calls "SPIRITUAL GIFTS". These "GIFTS" are placed there BY GOD to EQUIP you to SERVE God's KINGDOM through a CHURCH or a "MOVEMENT of DIFFERENT PEOPLE".

You see them around our churches every Sunday. We have people who GREET you as you come in the DOORS (with nametags). We have people who SERVE your KIDS through BMZ Kidz Kare and BMZ Kidz. They are volunteers! The people who PLAY MUSIC. The people who are RUNNING the TECHNOLOGY. Volunteers who are willing to SERVE! They have said, *"God, use me!"*

But, there are MORE! We have people who serve BEHIND the SCENES, whether that is different ministries throughout the week (Food Pantry, Feeding kids, WNSS, prep for BMZ Kidz, people who come into our OFFICE and FOLD PROGRAMS and COUNT MONEY, etc.) or taking care of us on Sunday (TECHNOLOGY STUFF and INFORMATION TABLES).

I've watched this through the 17 years that I've been at BMZ ... God continues to put the RIGHT PEOPLE in the RIGHT PLACES at the RIGHT TIME. WE function together like a BODY ... Ephesians 4:16 = ¹⁶ *He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.* ⁷

BMZ Church not only does OUTREACH into our COMMUNITIES, we do OUTREACH to OTHER CHURCHES! ON September 24th, we will have numerous churches from around Wisconsin CONVERGE on BMZ – Boscobel as we do a FOCUS Day. We are TEACHING

⁶ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jos 24:15). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁷ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Eph 4:16). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

what we do when it comes to WORSHIP and GROWTH GROUPS ... AND, you have a chance to SERVE BEFORE and DURING that event! Maybe you need to look at your NEXT STEPS ... if you are good at FOOD PREP ... Sign Up right on your Connection Card. If you are available in Thursday Night to help get the building ready ... Sign up on your CC! If you would be willing to HELP in some way the Saturday of the Event, SIGN UP on your CC! If you do, someone will be in touch with you!

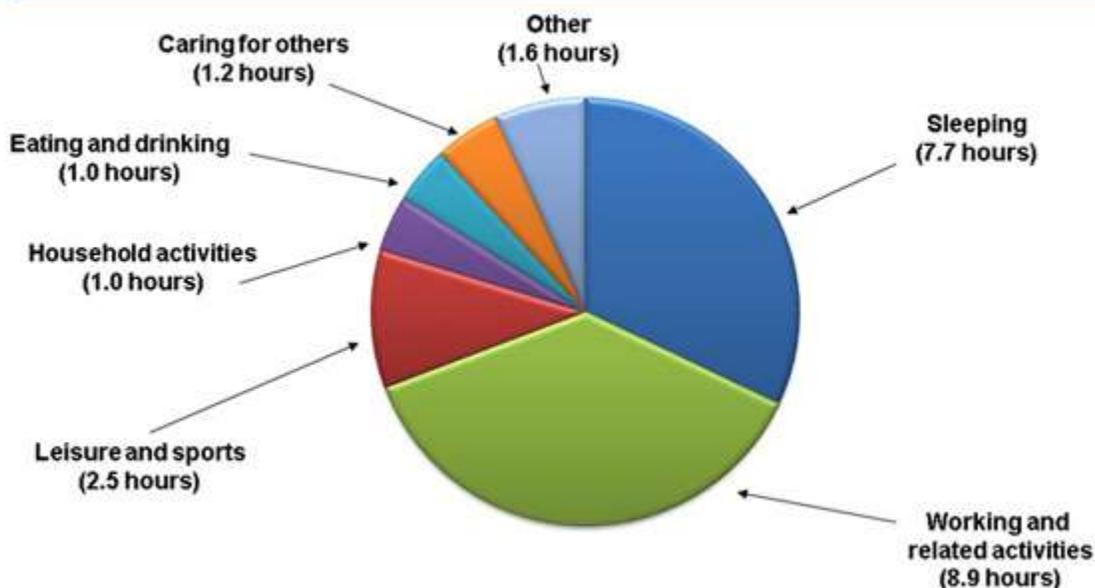
If you are a MEMBER of BMZ Church, part of our Membership Covenant is to AGREE to SERVE in the Church as part of a MOVEMENT for the Kingdom of God. Sign Up!

3. IN MY WORK

Many of us spend MUCH of our TIME at WORK! And, a lot of people don't think about taking God to work with them, but I'll tell you ... IF you go to work on Monday FOR GOD, it will change your PERSPECTIVE on WORK!

I thought this chart was interesting ...

Time use on an average work day for employed persons ages 25 to 54 with children



NOTE: Data include employed persons on days they worked, ages 25 to 54, who lived in households with children under 18. Data include non-holiday weekdays and are annual averages for 2014. Data include related travel for each activity.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey

What this shows us is that the Average American with Kids spends the most hours out of a work day ... at WORK! Do you honestly think that GOD does NOT want to use you THERE?! God says, *"I can use you at work!"*

Think about that. How can God use you at work? PRAY for co-workers. Pray for their Salvation (I DO!). INVITE them to worship with you! We are doing a series starting in OCTOBER called, "FINANCIAL FREEDOM". I know a LOT of PEOPLE who could USE SOME of THAT! It will make it EASIER for you to INVITE your CO-WORKERS who keep complaining about not getting paid enough... You could take a CO-WORKER the book, "UNSHAKABLE" when they are going through tough times!

BUT, the #1 way that God wants to use you at work? Set a GODLY example! When you go to work, work as if Jesus was right next to you! Do your work for an audience of ONE ... God! How can I please God in my work today?

Okay, let's read this verse from Colossians out loud TOGETHER ... if you DON'T LIKE your job, read it TWICE as LOUD! Colossians 3:23 = ²³ *Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*⁸ Work like that for your 8.9 hours in a work day. God will USE YOU to make a DIFFERENCE in this world! #4 =

4. IN MY WORLD

Speaking of which ... God wants to use you throughout the WORLD! Well, for most of us, that seems kind of DAUNTING! God wants to use me in the WORLD?? How?!? Well, when Jesus invited his Disciples to do this, he broke it down for them ... Acts 1:8 = ⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*⁹ Jesus starts with ... You can't do it under your own POWER. You need GODLY POWER ... Power of the Holy Spirit. That gives us the POWER to: PURIFY our Hearts, DEDICATE our Bodies, SIMPLIFY our Schedules and FORTIFY our Faith so that we are USABLE by GOD!

Then, Jesus gives direction ... Tell People about me EVERYWHERE! BUT, let's start in Jerusalem. Do you know WHERE Jesus was when he said this? Right. JERUSALEM! Start where you are AT! In your FAMILY! In your CHURCH! In your CURRENT WORK PLACE!

THEN, AFTER you get started there ... start looking further out ... Judea (WISCONSIN and surrounding areas), Samaria (The United States) and to the ends of the earth (Orphanages in South East Asia?).

Listen, God wants to use US ... YOU ... ME ... And, we will FEEL BLESSED when we DO LIFE GOD'S WAY ... like, SERVING GOD! BUT, it's NOT so that WE get the GLORY or that BMZ CHURCH looks good! It's so that we can POINT other people towards HIM!

5. FOR HIS GLORY

Our serving is for the GLORY of GOD and the building of GOD'S KINGDOM ... it's NOT about ME or YOU or OUR KINGDOMS! When I go all "GAME ON!" and get off the SIDELINES and GET IN the GAME GOD'S WAY, people are DRAWN to GOD! Lives are CHANGED. Families are CHANGED. Our Workplace is CHANGED. The world is changed.

And for us ... our LIVES start to MAKE SENSE. We start to realize that our PURPOSE in this life is BIGGER than what we thought. Some people miss out on FULFILLMENT and HAPPINESS and JOY and MEANING BECAUSE they are NOT IN the GAME!

When we are SERVING, we are NOT saying, "*Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!*" We are POINTING others to GOD ... Listen to the Bible ... Romans 6:11 = ¹¹ *So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*¹⁰ You and I know a lot of people who could use some time experiencing what it means to be "ALIVE"! Maybe it's YOU! Maybe you are just DEAD MAN WALKING today. God wants MORE for YOU!

MY PRAYER FOR GOD TO USE ME:

Today, would you pray that THREE WORD PRAYER? "God, USE ME." As you pray that prayer, I want to share an example of someone else who prayed that in the Old Testament.

⁸ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Col 3:23). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ac 1:8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

¹⁰ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ro 6:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Isaiah prayed this prayer ... Isaiah 6:8 = ⁸ *Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?” I said, “Here I am. Send me.”* ¹¹

Isaiah said, “Put me in! I’m **READY** to **REALLY LIVE!** Let’s do **LIFE YOUR WAY!**” Will you pray that prayer as well? **“Here I am, God. I’m over here in South West Wisconsin. I’m part of the MOVEMENT for YOUR KINGDOM that’s called BMZ Church. Send me.”**

Let’s Pray!

COMMUNION!

Next Steps: *I will memorize John 17:18*
 I will go “GAME ON” by serving at FOCUS Day on Saturday, September 24th
 I will pray for God to “USE ME!” in the area of: _____
 I will start a Bible Reading Program off of www.bmzchurch.org

¹¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Is 6:8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.