

LAUNCHING AT THE WOLF: THE NEXT STEP

22 MAY, 2026

SUMMARY

This message marks a pivotal moment in the Catholic Guy Ministry's evolution as Bruce Downes shares his personal spiritual wrestling with God's call to expand the ministry into a global ecclesial community called "IMPACTERS." Drawing from his 15 years of parish missions across nations and his encounter with saints like Mary MacKillop and Mother Cabrini, Bruce challenges listeners to move beyond comfortable Christianity toward radical obedience. The central metaphor of the Good Shepherd who runs toward the wolf rather than away from danger frames the call to serve the poor, weak, hidden, and hurting worldwide. This message confronts spiritual complacency and invites believers to sacrificial living through four pillars of proclamation (prayer/spirituality, formation, mercy, and evangelization) and four pathways of encounter (communities, leadership training, mercy work, and residential discipleship schools). The message culminates in an invitation for people globally to sell homes, resign jobs, and relocate to join this mission.

KEY POINTS

- God continues pursuing us regardless of our devotion level or length of faith journey
- Spiritual wrestling occurs when God calls us to deeper surrender beyond our comfort zones
- The Good Shepherd runs toward the wolf to protect the sheep, modeling sacrificial love that doesn't abandon the beloved when danger comes
- Christians are called to be "owners" not "hired hands" - taking responsibility for God's people as heirs with Christ
- The church exists in a bubble, only reaching those already attending, while the spiritually poor outside remain unreached
- Holiness means doing what God asks, even when it costs us everything
- Saints throughout history wrestled with God's call before surrendering to radical obedience
- IMPACTERS have four pillars: prayer/spirituality (Carmelite tradition), formation/training, mercy ministry, and evangelization
- A residential discipleship school will bring people from around the world to live immersed in faith community before being sent out globally
- The ministry will serve parishes, dioceses, and bishops while building communities worldwide
- True Christian witness means living lives others want to imitate, following Paul's example

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- John 10:11-16 (The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and runs toward the wolf)
- Romans 8:14-17 (Being led by the Spirit as children and heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ)
- 1 Corinthians 11:1 (Paul's call to "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ")

STORIES:

- Bruce's personal story of having a bore and irrigation system installed at his home by Damon, a church member who refused payment as gratitude for spiritual blessing, only to discover there was no water when completed - illustrating how we can have all the infrastructure but lack the animating power of the Holy Spirit
- Bruce's son Joel asking what he would do to ensure his four children maintain their Catholic faith beyond age 21, given the statistics showing single-digit retention rates
- Bruce's calling experience on July 19, 1977 at age 18 when God spoke "I'm calling you to proclaim my glory to the ends of the earth"
- Bruce's second calling moment on July 12, 1996 in Sydney when God called him to reach those disconnected from the church
- Bruce waking three days after Easter Sunday and hearing God say "You will do this and it will cost you much but I will be with you"
- Bruce's brother explaining he would never hear about Bruce's speaking events because they're only advertised within church circles, highlighting the church's isolation from the unchurched
- Bruce's 15 years traveling 6-7 months annually doing parish missions, sleeping in different beds, meeting priests, bishops, and lay people who shaped his love for the church
- References to saints' spiritual wrestling: Augustine with desire and sin, Francis of Assisi with wealth and family expectations, Ignatius of Loyola recovering from injury, Teresa of Lisieux with hiddenness, Teresa of Avila with mediocrity and fear, John of the Cross with imprisonment, Oscar Romero with fear and violence, Mother Teresa with interior darkness for decades, Mother Cabrini with weakness and rejection, Mary MacKillop with misunderstanding by the church she loved

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

ICEBREAKER

Share a time when you felt God calling you to something that scared you. How did you respond?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Pipes Without Water

Bruce shared the story of his irrigation system - everything in place, but no water flowing.

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever felt like you have all the "right things" in place spiritually, but something is missing?
- What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit "animate" our faith rather than just going through the motions?
- Where in your spiritual life do you need God to turn on the water?

2. Spiritual Wrestling

Bruce was transparent about his year-long struggle with God's calling, even while ministering publicly.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it significant that Bruce shared his struggle rather than just his victory?
- Have you ever run from God's calling? What made you resist?
- Read Genesis 32:22-32 (Jacob wrestling with God). What does healthy spiritual wrestling look like?
- Bruce mentioned saints who wrestled: Augustine, Francis, Teresa of Calcutta. Which one resonates with your current season? Why?

3. The Good Shepherd vs. The Hired Hand

The central image: when the wolf comes, the hired hand runs away, but the shepherd runs toward danger.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean to be an "owner" rather than a "hired hand" in your sphere of influence?
- Who are the "sheep" in your life (family, friends, community)?

- What are the "wolves" threatening them (cultural pressures, spiritual darkness, isolation)?
- What would it look like for you to "run toward the wolf" in your current circumstances?

4. The Cost of Obedience

Bruce promised two things: "It will hurt" and "You will meet the Lord."

Discussion Questions:

- Why do we often want God's blessing without God's cost?
- Share an experience where obedience to God cost you something but led you closer to Him.
- What comfort or security might God be asking you to surrender right now?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week:

- **Identify your "hired hand" tendencies.** Where are you tempted to run when things get difficult rather than engage?
- **Pray Romans 8:14-17** daily: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God... heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."
- **Have an honest conversation with God** about what He's asking of you. Journal your wrestling.

This Month:

Choose one "wolf" to run toward. This could be:

- Reaching out to a family member who's left the faith
- Getting involved in a ministry that scares you
- Having a difficult conversation you've been avoiding
- Serving someone in need outside your comfort zone

Long-term Consideration:

- **Evaluate your level of commitment.** Bruce mentioned some will sell homes, resign jobs, or move nations. While not everyone is called to such dramatic steps, ask: "Am I holding anything back from God?"
- **Seek formation opportunities.** Where can you be immersed in deeper faith formation? Consider retreats, spiritual direction, or community involvement.
- **Mentor someone.** Paul said, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." Who could benefit from seeing your life of faith up close?

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving Father, we come before you asking for the courage of the Good Shepherd. Help us to be owners, not hired hands. Give us eyes to see the wolves threatening those we love, and give us the courage to run toward danger rather than away from it. We surrender our comfort, our security, and our plans to You. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit that we might have power to do what You're calling us to do. We make this prayer in Jesus' name, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.