

Go Domino

Domino Effect Series Week 3: 4/15/18

Acts 9:1-19

Welcome/intro/vision

Week 3 of a series we're calling The Domino Effect, if you're new, we're talking about how the first Easter Sunday unleashed an unprecedented amount of good into the world

If you Google "non-profit organizations" what you find: Jesus 's **influence is EVERYWHERE:**

You've got literally THOUSANDS upon thousands of non-profits and service organizations doing fantastic work all over the globe

totaling BILLIONS of dollars and BILLIONS of men and women hours quietly making a difference

Trying to tackle some of the most difficult and stubborn problems in some of the harshest and most difficult environments on the globe

Something happened 2,000 years ago that tipped off a chain of events that unleashed unprecedented generosity into the world

How did the events of Easter Sunday tip off the domino effect of good that continues to our lifetimes, 2,000 years later.

And we're not just talking about the domino effect, we're inviting everyone to jump in on the Domino Effect

We've passed out this card over the past 2 weeks with a domino and some instructions

We're inviting everyone to post on Facebook different ways we're volunteering or serving with a non-profit making a difference somewhere, anywhere in the world.

Tag the church and with the hashtag dominoeffect, tell us about the organization and what it does

We're watching throughout this series and we'll award \$1,000 to one organization nominated by someone here at our Woods Charter location on April 22nd, NEXT SUNDAY, which will be the last day of this series

Here are some of this week's pics...

NOMINATIONS ARE DUE BY WEDNESDAY

If you weren't here last week, lots of these in the back--grab a postcard with a domino, go take some selfies, post it on Facebook, tell us about the organization so we can all learn about the different things happening out there

And you could help your organization win \$1,000.

Meanwhile, on Sunday mornings, we're tracing a few of the stories in the Scriptures of the domino effect—particularly how the first Christians continued to work out and apply Jesus's teaching in such a way that they continued to work out this domino effect of good

Today I want to open with this question:

Have you ever felt compelled, for whatever reason, to do something that you know in your own nature or left to your own desires, you would never ordinarily do?

You just have a sense, in spite of the voices in your head that are objecting, that you need to go and tackle that project you've been putting off or have that conversation or make that phone call?

Or that you need to go over and help that person even though you'd much rather be doing something else, anything else?

Today we're going to look at a story where God is all about positioning people to be a part of the domino effect by going to people and places where they, if left to their own devices, would never want to go

And what we're going to see is that *the domino effect that Jesus wants to unleash through us at some level will almost always stretch us*

Stretch us to go to people we might not have otherwise bothered to care about, stretch us to go to places we would have never gone on our own

And what we're going to see is that stretching, even though it can be hard and risky and require a good bit of energy, involves both cost and blessing

When we stretch in response to the call of God to participate in the domino effect there is cost, obviously, and we need to be honest about that cost

But there is also grace and blessing that waits for us as we move

Bible/no Bible: Acts 9:1-19

What we have in the book of Acts is the account of what happened to and with the earliest Christians after Jesus left

And today we're going to pick up the story just as persecution on the early church has been unleashed in full force for the first time.

Just before this we've got the first recorded martyr, a man named Stephen is the first one to be killed for his faith

And leading the charge in terms of persecuting the early church is a man named Saul who has a dramatic encounter with God that changes everything

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

So here we've got this guy Saul who's an up and coming leader in the ancient Jewish hierarchy
And he's making a name for himself on the corporate ladder as being the hatchet man—the guy who's going to do everything in his power to extinguish these obnoxious people who belonged to what they called “the Way”

So he goes to the high priest in Jerusalem and he gets permission to arrest anyone, men or women, who belong to that **movement who are up HERE in Damascus**

If you wanted to drive that today, it'd be just over 200 miles and Google Maps tells us that it would take you about 5 ½ hours to drive it

Paul's car is in the shop, so he's having to ride some much slower animal to get there

But he gets the green light from the high priest

And as he's leaving Jerusalem to go to Damascus, Saul is full of adrenaline and authority and pomp and he's got an entourage with him and he thinks he's king of the world, full of self-righteous anger and vengeance

But Jesus has a date with Saul in the midst of his inquisition, let's see what happens next

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Some days you feel like you can conquer anything, other days you feel like the challenges of life are totally overwhelming

Saul left Jerusalem ready to conquer anything: full of energy and self-assurance, certain he was going to conquer the world

But he entered Damascus being led by the hand, humbled, blind, utterly powerless

Now here's the question: at which point did Saul FEEL better? At which point in this journey, did Saul FEEL better about himself and about being Saul? Leaving Jerusalem

At which point was he ACTUALLY BECOMING better? As he entered Damascus

Saul FELT better leaving Jerusalem full of self-righteous pride and arrogance

he was BECOMING BETTER as he entered Damascus, humbled, having met Jesus, the risen Lord

And from this comes a very important biblical principle for anyone who wants to take following Jesus in any way seriously:

Just because you FEEL better doesn't mean you ARE better

There are all kinds of decisions you can make that would FEEL better than walking in the Jesus way, at least temporarily

But just because you FEEL better doesn't mean that you ARE better.

And very often, at some point in our journey, the REAL path to REAL better runs right through some season of life where we are knocked down and rendered incapable of all that we previously thought we were about

When Saul was pumped up full of himself and his agenda and his adrenaline and anger, he felt better, but the healthier, more life-giving place for him to be was on the other side of God's discipline and correction

My friends, none of us like the process of being corrected or re-directed by God.

I've had several turns in my life where I've been corrected or re-directed and my first response was anger and frustration and in a couple of cases it took me months and months to get over it

But if we're willing to receive God's correction in our lives as a gift of grace in our lives, even if it doesn't feel as good initially as it did before the correction came

Ultimately it will always produce more life in us, not less.

Because Life is God's property, it's his idea, and he delights to give more and more life to us generously, but sometimes we're on paths that cut us off from the life he wants to give us

And so this morning if you're on the other side of a correction that God's placed in your life and you're hurting or disappointed or upset

OR if you're in the middle of a situation where God is trying to re-direct you, if he's convicting you of something and you're resistant to it, which is unfortunately very normal

I want to implore you that life on the other side of submitting to his voice is ultimately always, always, always more life-giving than life lived in resistance to God's voice and his discipline

Jesus is at work, tipping over some dominoes and setting up for some serious domino tipping, and he's not done yet

He's going to make another dramatic call to another person to involve him in the domino effect that Jesus wants to start and continue through this man Saul:

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

So Ananias is in Damascus, which was going to be ground zero for Saul's next big raid

And God appears to him in a vision and tells him that Saul has seen a vision of him, name and all

And as Steve Tamayo once famously said, if I'm Ananias my first response is "WAIT! You gave him my name?? And a vision of my face?"

Great Jesus, here's my street address, my credit card number and my social, just give all that to him, too!"

Saul's reputation has preceded him, they know he's on his way with authority to arrest Jesus followers

AND NOW, Jesus is giving him this dramatic word that nobody wants to hear in this particular situation: **GO!**

Go! To the person who is your enemy, who is your greatest threat

GO and trust me, that I've gone ahead and done something remarkable to prepare the way for you

Ananias is understandably concerned about this go, he's got good reason to object to this particular Go, this man has done harm to people in Jerusalem and he's come here to harm me!

Here's how God responds:

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go!"

AGAIN! No getting around it! Ever had an experience where you couldn't get away from this ongoing sense of "I've got to get going and do this even though I don't want to?"

The Lord is going to press Ananias to go and tip over this domino. And as a part of helping him to get going, the Lord is more generous than usual in revealing the why behind the Go!

The Lord goes on to explain:

This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

I want you to go Ananias, and I want you to tip over this domino, because this man is going to tip over into **the Gentiles**—that's ANYONE in the world who wasn't a Jew

This man is going to be the domino that tips over and starts the Jesus way movement among the whole rest of the world

In fact, I'm going to open doors for him to speak to **their kings**, too!

If you follow the rest of the book of Acts, it tells the account of how Saul, who will change his name to Paul which means little or nothing, he ends up in the courts of Rome, telling governors and kings and authorities about the resurrection of Jesus

And Israel is included here as well. Throughout the rest of his life, Paul will proclaim the wonders of Jesus to all kinds of people from all over the world

But his first love will always be his own Jewish people, the people of Israel, whom he will beg and plead with to know and trust in what God had done in Jesus

And there's this closing word of suffering, which can sound a little vindictive—like Jesus is getting Saul back for the sufferings he inflicted on people previously

But what we're going to see throughout the rest of Saul's life is that suffering will continue, he'll be disputed with and arrested and beaten and shipwrecked and endure all kinds of trials

But the suffering will always serve blessing. The physical suffering that he'll endure will always end in Saul experiencing more and more life.

And in the end, he will say that his sufferings are cause for rejoicing

because there are some things more important and more powerful than suffering that he gets to experience as a result of the suffering

So Ananias gets this little glimpse into what God's going to do through Saul, and that's enough to tip over HIS domino, to get him moving towards Saul, let's take a look:

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Has anyone ever spoken kindly to you that had every reason to speak harshly to you? Ever been the unexpected recipient of grace and mercy from someone who you didn't think would show you grace or mercy?

Wonderful, kind, generous words of grace and love to a man who had done tremendous damage in Jerusalem and who had come to Damascus to do damage to HIM

This is what happens when Jesus people submit to and receive the Spirit of Jesus. They are strong enough to walk up to former persecutors and enemies and speak words of life

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Chatham County has a large population of people who are fiercely devoted to a life that is primarily marked by 3 letters: D. I. Y: Do It Yourself

For many people in Chatham County especially those who are a part of deep Chatham or old Chatham, they don't live in subdivisions but down long dirt or gravel roads with 10-100 acres and no neighbors

For those people, if you have to HIRE SOMEONE ELSE to do something around your house or on your car, something's wrong with you

There are some tremendously gifted handymen and handywomen who are trying to scrape out a living here in Chatham County because NOBODY WILL HIRE THEM TO DO ANYTHING

Everyone who lives in Deep Chatham thinks they COULD be a handyman or handywoman if they wanted to be, but why bother? Who would NEED someone ELSE to do work around the house?

To which people like me say "ME!"

DIY culture makes a lot of sense if you can pull it off—if you want something done RIGHT and you know HOW it should be done, then who should do it? Yourself!

DIY is the easiest, simplest, most straightforward and efficient way for someone who's really GREAT at doing something to get it done

So here's the question that this passage and so many like it pose: why doesn't Jesus just Do It Himself?

Jesus is GREAT at reaching people, he did it all the time. And he certainly reaches Saul through the blinding light in a very clear and unmistakable way

But he doesn't tip the domino all the way over. He only nudges it like half-way. WHY??

Here's how Jesus maps this series of dominos:

Jesus half-nudges Saul

But he totally dominoes Ananias who will finish **tipping into Saul** who will tip over dominos called **Gentiles**—that's most of us, **Kings**, and **Israel**

Why does Jesus not just cut out the middle-man? Why not just Do-It-Himself?

Wouldn't it be much more efficient and effective for Jesus to knock Gentiles, Kings, and all Israel down with blinding lights in the middle of their days and reveal himself?

At the very least, if he wants Saul to do all this work, that's fine, but why involve poor Ananias?

In fact, come to think of it, the whole Bible is full of accounts of people who God invites to be a part of his work who either totally blow it or at least make it much, much more messy than it needed to be.

People are messy, ever notice that? Anything involving people involves mess. Why on earth would God not do the more efficient thing of just doing his work, his way, to make sure it all got done right?

To answer that, my friends, we have to go back to the very beginning...

If you're new to the Bible, it starts with a creation story. There's a whole lot of conversation that swirls around this story, how much of it is poetry v. how much of it is literal, lots to talk about there

But whatever else is happening, as Christians we believe this opening creation story is telling us the truth about three of the most important and fundamental questions in the universe:
who God is, who we are, and what we're here to do

And in the creation account, God makes all things and they're all good, good, and good, and then the last thing that God creates is humanity, men and women, made in his own image, and THEY are very good

And God writes up their job description before he creates them, here's what he says:

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule [have dominion] over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God makes EVERYTHING, it's perfect paradise, everything's good

and then he creates men and women in his own image to have dominion and work in paradise to make it even more beautiful, to make the world to flourish even more

they are given a legitimate AUTHORITY over this place—it's a borrowed authority and they will be held accountable for how they steward that authority, but it's a legitimate authority nonetheless

It's like you decide to open a small business and then you hire someone else to run and manage it for you

you're still the boss and the owner, but what the manager does in the day-to-day operations will in many ways be the key deciding factor for how or if the business flourishes

In the biblical story what happens is that the first men and women who were given this authority and this power give it away to the powers of evil

They fall for the great lie that we've all fallen for ever since, that you can't trust God and that if you want real happiness and joy and fulfillment you have to do things your own way instead of walking in faith with him

But God created this whole world to run with men and women made in his image to have authority to bless *or curse* the rest of what God created

Because we refused and continue to refuse to walk in step with God's flourishing, we get the world we have around us—full of all kinds of pains and sorrows and brokenness and violence

But what you see throughout the Bible is that God originally created this world whereby he deputized humans to rule over this place and his intention was that we'd use our power and authority to bless this place

And even after it all goes wrong, what we see is that he still wants to operate according to these rules that he set in place as much as possible

It's like God invented a board game like chess, with specific rules that applied to that game. He LOVES that game, it was his idea, it's got a beauty and an elegance to it

And what happened was someone else came along and tried to ruin it by telling people they don't have to play by his rules in order to experience the joy of chess, just move your pieces any way you want to, it'll be fine!

But it turns out there's no joy in chess if you don't play by the rules, the whole experience is cheapened, hollow, empty

God invented this board game more elegant and full of much more joy than chess. And he likes the rules he put in place, including the part where humans have dominion over what he created

And what we see throughout the biblical story is that God is at work to continually call and equip people to actually exercise and work out that dominion and authority that he gave us in the beginning but to do it the right way—to win the game he designed to begin with, not by breaking the rules but by playing by them

And so throughout the Bible, God says GO!

God delights to include messy, broken, imperfect people into his great and wonderful work of redemption

So that we might actually exercise that authority in ways that align with God's grace, that we as God's image bearers might both receive grace and be instruments of it

And so Jesus nudges Saul's domino, but doesn't tip it all the way over, he's going to bring in Ananias as an instrument of grace, that he might exercise a life-giving authority in this situation to restore sight

Saul came to Damascus wanting to curse and do violence against Christians, but now a Jesus-follower will take his place within a unique delegated authority to restore Saul to full sight and bless him rather than curse him back

Saul is blessed, Ananias is blessed, the life of God flows through them both, and God-given dominion and authority is used rightly, to bless not curse

And as Ananias tips into Saul, even though Saul was his enemy, even though Saul was the "other"

What's going to happen is that Saul then will be sent to others who are the other: Gentiles and their kings

Saul hated the Gentiles and their kings when he was a Jewish Pharisee, now he's going to bless them with the love of God expressed through Jesus

And this domino effect of Ananias being sent to the other and then Saul being sent to the 'other' continues to play out, generation after generation, decade after decade, century after century

Until you've got in more recent times Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. the 50th anniversary of his assassination was just a week and a half ago we'll talk more about HIM next week

But the domino effect of being sent to the other, across people groups to people who you might not engage with otherwise

Has been played out and lived out by many Jesus followers throughout the centuries that don't make headlines

Let me tell you about **Scott and Tina** Lawrence, two missionaries that our church supports.

Scott was an eye doctor practicing in Chapel Hill at UNC, making great money, doing great work, wonderful wife, three beautiful kids, he was living the American dream!

Except he chose following Jesus as more important and more life-giving than the American dream

So he and his family after much prayer and discernment, decided to uproot their family and move to

Where he, just like Ananias before him, is giving sight to those who are blind, or at least those who are threatened by blindness.

We're going to watch a short video here in a moment with Scott describing some of the stories of the work they've done

But before we get to that, I want to invite all of us into this domino effect call:

Today's Take-WITH (Wildly Important Take-Home)

[God's call to step into] The domino effect involves a call to "go" and risk (often to the "other"). What's your resistance to that call? How might you overcome that resistance?

The biblical story is one where humans were given authority to bless or curse this world.

The call from God to participate in the domino effect is the call to step into yours and my rightful place in the world

To be men and women who bear God's image and express something of the greatness of God's character in whatever sphere or place that we inhabit

But the reality is almost all of us feel some resistance to that call—in our small group we talked about our need to slow down, pay attention, listen, look for opportunities,

One person said they had to overcome that fear of looking weird

One friend of mine used to say that God was always at work all around us, inviting us into his work of good everywhere

And the most important thing is when opportunities come up just "DON'T DUCK!"

Most of us have a tendency to duck, to miss out, to resist or avoid, either actively or passively. What's your tendency, how might you overcome that?

Answering this question might mean all the difference between you living a life full of purpose and you just drifting through life without one

Being willing to do some heart, soul, and mind work around this question might open you up for something that right now is more than you could ever ask or imagine.

Take this question, do some good prayer work around it this week, and see if you might get some traction on it

Because the domino effect is happening all around us, life, life, life and more life being poured out generously all around us, and we're invited to step into it

But for most of us, we're going to have to overcome our own internal resistance in order to enter in

PRAY, offering intro, cue video