Decided to Follow Jesus,” is a powerful testament to his faith and his commitment to God. If we buy-in to the culture of love, peace, compassion, and justice that Jesus offers, the “stay” or “go” options become less relevant: we can promote those things anywhere and everywhere, no matter the circumstance or the cost.

Second, spiritual journeys *happen within the community of faith*. We are responsible for seeing the potential in one another and nurturing the gifts God gives us for ministry. Andor Földes was a young Hungarian piano prodigy. In 1921, at the age of 8, he played his first concert with the Budapest Philharmonic. He played one of Mozart’s concertos. Emil von Sauer, one of the most revered pianists of the day, had come to Budapest to hear young Andor’s play. Von Sauer asked Andor to play for him and the young man obliged, masterfully playing some of the most difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann.

When Andor finished, von Sauer walked over to him and planted a kiss on his forehead. “My son,” he said, “when I was your age I became a student of [Franz] Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, ‘Take good care of this kiss — it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play. I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it.” Just as that kiss passed from one teacher to another, so too, the community of faith passes along its wisdom, its encouragement, and its blessing to the generations that follow.

Finally, *when we risk, we receive something greater* than we ever imagined. Following God means pushing beyond the easy, the familiar, and the safe. It means taking the hard road, the long road, the road less travelled, like Elisha did, because we believe that God has something greater in store.When we take the risk and follow Jesus, God is faithful in equipping us for the next part of the journey. We are like the servants in Jesus’ parable whose boss gave them money to invest while he was out of town. The most lavish praise, as you may recall, is heaped on the servant who risked it all. Taking a risk for God and being blessed by the sometimes-difficult effort is a recurring theme in the Bible.

* Abraham traveled to an unknown country, and God rewarded his obedience by making him the father of many nations.
* Noah built a massive boat in the desert, and God rewarded Noah’s efforts by saving him and his family from the flood.
* Joseph remained true to God om the face of betrayal, slavery, and false accusations, and God rewarded Joseph’s loyalty by raising him to high office in Egypt.
* Esther risked her life by speaking directly to King Xerxes, and God rewarded her courage by saving her people from destruction.
* Daniel prayed to God despite the king’s decree forbidding it, leading to Daniel’s arrest and imprisonment in the lion’s den. God rewarded Daniel’s faithfulness by shutting the lions’ mouths and sparing Daniel’s life.
* Ruth left her home and family to support Naomi, and God rewarded her devotion by making her an ancestor of King David and of Jesus.
* Elisha refused to abandon Elijah, and God rewarded Elisha with the mantle of leadership and a double portion of Elijah’s prophetic spirit.

 In each case, someone asked the fundamental question: should I stay, or should I go? As human beings, we tend to overthink things. As far as we know, Elisha did not pray about his decision. He did not consult other prophets, convene a focus group, or talk to friends. When Elijah said, “STAY,” Elisha refused to comply, and instead got up and followed the prophet to his next stop. Elisha did what he felt to be right, staying in-step with Elijah, and for that he made no apology. If Elisha had stayed or taken the easier path, he would have missed out on a double portion of God’s Spirit. He would have missed out on his true calling from God.

Sometimes deciding whether we should stay or whether we should go takes a long, long time. When I was confirmed at age 14, one of the members of my home church suggested I should consider ministry as a career. At the time, that was the last thing I wanted to do. Instead, I went to college and trained to be a history teacher. As there were no teaching jobs available when I graduated, I went into banking and worked my way into customer service roles. I also moonlighted at a local Congregational Church as their office manager. The interim pastor there talked with me many times about ministry, which I still resisted.

Finally, not knowing what else to do, I asked: should I stay, or should I go? Family and friends encouraged me, so I applied to seminary with the intention of earning my doctorate and teaching church history at the college level. As part of the seminary program, each student had to work fulltime in a ministry over the summer. I applied for six internships in a variety of non-church settings but was not selected for any of them. Then, unexpectedly, a last-minute opportunity arose to serve two congregations in Scotland. I interviewed, out of desperation as much as interest, and was accepted. So, again, I had to ask: should I stay, or should I go? I went.

The internship in Scotland changed my life’s trajectory. I loved working with the faithful, caring people of those congregations. I finally accept God’s unrelenting nudge into church ministry. I completed my seminary degree and got my first job with a church out east. A few years later, Karen and I asked: should we stay, or should we go? When we interviewed here at Federated Church, we had our answer: we would go. Everything from the wonderful people we met, to the strength of the congregation’s ministries, to the ease with which we received denominational permission, to the smooth transition of buying a house only affirmed our decision to move here and join this ministry. We’ve not regretted the choice to go where we felt God leading us.

I offer up my journey into ministry, not to be the hero of the story, but because it proves to me the persistence of God and the patience of God while big decisions are made. God is not a helicopter parent, micromanaging us, ready to intervene at the slightest danger or criticize our every move. God is a God of breadth, latitude, and mercy who is pleased to let us function within the operational boundaries, employee guidelines, social norms, and rules of engagement that already orient our lives. With such an enriched understanding of God as open, encouraging, and empowering comes a greater willingness to respond when God nudges us to consider “should I stay, or should I go?” When that decision is made, there can be a deeper sense of peace and joy.

The story of Elijah and Elisha is a fascinating study in decision-making, loyalty, and obedience vs. disobedience. Elisha showed us what it means to be committed to a call no matter what the cost! He embodied a dynamic spiritual journey, within a community of faith, that led to great blessings for him and greater glory for God. As God did with Elisha, God will also give us the strength to stay when we need to stay, and the courage to go when called into the unknown. Let me end with some wisdom from Proverbs: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make your paths straight” (3:5-6).

Prayer: God of power, without your love we can do nothing. Give us a double share of your spirit so that we can work together to fulfill your vision of peace and prosperity, compassion and justice for all people. Teach us to follow the examples of the prophets, to speak clearly alongside the poor and to work tirelessly for the good. We ask this through your Son Jesus Christ who brought healing and love to the whole world. Amen.

**Sources:**

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**Should I Stay or Should I Go?**

Sunday, June 29, 2025 [2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Kings+2%3a1-2%2c+6-14&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

According to the Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO), almost four million Americans live overseas. That doesn’t count excluding military personnel or government workers. Most of these expatriates are in Canada or Mexico, but a significant percentage live in Europe or the Pacific Rim countries. Many are families with children learning to be “third culture kids,” and attending private schools. At some point, these people asked themselves, “Do we stay here, or do we go back to the United States?”

Americans are always on the move, always open for a change of scenery. In 2023, approximately 25.6 million Americans moved. Some relocated across state lines to escape a high cost of living, high taxes, high crime, or high congestion. Others moved to take a new job, be closer to family or settle into retirement. These people asked the question: “Should we stay, or should we go?”

It reminds me of the hit song by The Clash, “Should I Stay or Should I Go?” *Darling, you got to let me know, should I stay, or should I go? If you say that you are mine, I’ll be here ’til the end of time. So, you got to let me know, should I stay, or should I go?*

It’s surprising how often this question arises. In today’s reading, Elijah repeatedly tells Elisha to “Stay.” He sounds like he is talking to a disobedient dog. “STAY, Elisha, stay! Good prophet.” But Elisha does not stay; he goes. Elisha gets an explicit command from the holiest prophet in Israel’s history: “STAY!” Yet Elisha clings to Elijah like a fly on molasses. More than once, Elijah says “stay!” More than once, Elisha says, “I will not leave you.” Elisha’s doggedness evokes some helpful lessons for our own spiritual journey.

First, God’s command to “stay” or “go” isnot about physical location but *about our commitment to a higher calling.* Like Elisha, Christians are essentially followers. We follow Jesus. But as the Lord himself noted, not everyone buys into this. Many are simply curious but not truly committed. In the mid-1800s, Christian missionaries travelled to Assam, India, to spread the Gospel of Jesus among the Garo, a tribe of headhunters. One missionary successfully converted a man, his wife, and their two children. Enraged by the conversions, the tribal chief executed the man’s wife and children and pressured the man to renounce his faith. Despite the loss of his family, the man when faced with execution but filled with the Holy Spirit, repeatedly declared, “I have decided to follow Jesus.” The hymn, “I Have