

In the 1950s, doctors told Dutch evangelist Andrew van der Bijl that he was "too weak to travel" because he suffered from chronic back pain. But, this veteran preacher, known as "Brother Andrew" by his supporters worldwide, would do nothing but travel since his outreach to the persecuted church began in 1955.

He'd go on to visit 125 countries and log an estimated 1 million miles. He'd go through at least a dozen passports but miraculously never lose a suitcase. He'd survive one plane accident, but said the impact of that crash in the early 1970s actually healed his back.

His amazing journey started with a drive from his home in Alkmaar, Holland, to Warsaw, Poland, where he first witnessed the suffering of churches behind the Iron Curtain. Then came Czechoslovakia. Then he drove his blue Volkswagen--which came to be known as his "miracle car"--to Yugoslavia. Next came East Germany, Bulgaria and Romania. Then came trips to Russia and China.

Brother Andrew's travels never stopped, but they became more dangerous. In the 1950s and 1960s he successfully transported thousands of Bibles

into communist countries, and a 1967 book about his adventures, *God's Smuggler*, gave his ministry the worldwide support he needed to expand. After the biography increased his visibility and made it difficult for him to travel in the communist bloc, he began focusing more of his attention on the Middle East.

The organization he founded, *Open Doors With Brother Andrew*, has 27 offices around the world, 350 full-time employees and an army of volunteers. They smuggle 1 million Bibles to China annually and distribute tons more to 45 other countries.

Not too bad for a guy who was told he shouldn't drive or get on a plane. He's continued to do this well into the twilight of his life.

"I am not an evangelical stuntman," the white-haired evangelist says defensively. "I am just an ordinary guy. What I did, anyone can do."

His early years were shaped by enormous challenges. During the German occupation of Holland he hid in ditches with other teenage boys to avoid

being drafted by the Nazis. He often ate tulip bulbs to survive food shortages.

When he became of fighting age he went to Indonesia with the Dutch army- until a bullet shattered his ankle and sent him home. The bloodshed he witnessed in Indonesia shaped his views of war and drove him to alcohol until he surrendered his life to Jesus in a tiny room in the attic of his parents' home. In 1950 he answered the call to ministry in an evangelistic tent crusade.

Then the real adventure began. After he told God he would go anywhere for Him, his ankle was miraculously healed and he enrolled in Bible college in Scotland. God gave Him a mission. His back problems prevented him from graduating, but the lessons he learned prepared him for a spiritual battle far more challenging than anything he experienced in Indonesia as a commando.

A defining moment came in 1957, when he pulled his Volkswagen up to a security checkpoint at the border of Yugoslavia. He had dozens of Bibles

hidden in the tiny car, and he had to deliver them to desperate Christians who were starving for God's Word.

Just before the guard began the search, Brother Andrew breathed this prayer:

"Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture that I want to take to Your children across this border. When You were on Earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see."

God answered his prayer. The guard didn't see the Bibles even though they were visible in his opened suitcase. Andrew drove his car across the border, then met with small congregations huddled in clandestine locations. He found them in Budapest, Prague, Cluj and Moscow. Later in life, Brother Andrew conducted almost all his efforts in Islamic nations. Yasser Arafat knew Brother Andrew personally and even allowed God's Smuggler and copies of the Jesus film to be sold in a Bible bookshop in Gaza.

All of this work helped scores of people who were in need. And while it was tough work, Brother Andrew knows it's not about him. As he says: "I have

never really felt danger,..There really is no danger, unless you are living your own life.”

That sense of mission has kept him calm in perilous situations. Once when he preached in Colombia, guerrillas pointed guns at him throughout the sermon. In 2001 he visited the home of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the late founder of the Hamas terrorist group, and shared Christ with him. In Lebanon, he distributed Bibles to a group of hostages who were being held in a prison.

Now 91, Brother Andrew is still active with the organization he founded, and still striving to win souls for Christ.

Who knows how many people he has brought to God. But all of this was possible because he made a choice to use what God has given him, first to help himself, and then help others, even though in both situations he could have given up.

The parable of the dishonest steward is a little challenging for it sounds like Jesus is endorsing a shady businessman. It's not meant to endorse how to

run a business. Rather the heart of the Gospel is that those who have possessions should share them with the needy and benefit others. The rich man in the story is an absentee landlord, a strongly disliked person because regular people had to borrow from landlords at high interest, never getting out of debt. They were enslaved by it. The steward watched over the affairs for the landlords, and this one in the Gospel has been mismanaging the money, taking some for himself, and so the jig is up, he faces being fired.

But he's smart. He's clever. He comes up with a plan to reduce the amount of debt creditors owe the landlord. He reduces the interest on each note, which the landlord will not notice or miss. The creditors though will benefit and hopefully provide for the dishonest steward should he need their help. Even the landlord commends the quick action of the steward.

Luke who writes the Gospel isn't saying follow this immoral business decision. Rather, what is being held up for imitation is the steward's shrewdness in the use what he has.

As we think about it, it's worth asking ourselves how do we use what God has given us to make both ourselves better and one another better?

With respect to ourselves, have you ever said "I can't do it" or "it's too hard?" There are some things that we can't do. I am not going to play for the Minnesota Vikings. Even with all the work on diet, exercise and learning football, at this point in my life, it's just not an option. But sometimes, we can become spiritually lazy. Andrew for instance in his life became addicted to alcohol; but he chose to do something about it; He chose to surrender to God and ask for help and face his problem, rather than run from it.

Spiritually, sometimes we run from things. Think of Adam and Eve; the snake made me do it; she made me do it. They can't own up to their sins at first. We do that sometimes as kids, but as adults we can get caught up in the blame game too. We blame officials for our favorite teams losing. We can say it's too hard to quit this bad habit. Even with sins we can blame others for making us do them, or say it's to take the edge off, or just stress, or no one knows, or it's not that big of a deal. It's hard to get in physical shape, and it's hard to get into spiritual shape. But God calls us to action, now. To use what we are given to grow in holiness. The good news is grace is amazing; but it requires a response. So if no man can serve two

masters, we have to ask ourselves who is our master? Is it really God? Or is it sensualism and lust? Is it alcohol? Is it a schedule? Is it materialism? Is it power or ego? Letting go, letting God isn't easy, but as Brother Andrew said, "There really is no danger, unless you are living your own life." It goes back to the words of Saint Paul, the life I live is not my own; it is Christ who lives in me. So let Christ live in you and realize He's given you so much and given you the ability to become a saint. For some it is harder based on the environment they are raised in or live in and life situations. But for all of us, it is possible. So don't say "it's hard" or "I can't" but rather "yes I can" for your spiritual bank account has a high balance called grace; make a withdrawal because what you take out will be replaced always with the love of God.

Here's the thing though, with that, we are called to evangelize. To be just like Brother Andrew and go out into the world. Think of what he could have said; I can't do this, I just have this little Volkswagen. I'm an insignificant person from Holland and lack the organization or know-how to go to these places, where do I begin? Yet note throughout his life he was like that steward, namely, clever, using that important spiritual tool. It helped him hide from the Nazis and being forced to fight for them but it also helped him

minister to people where governments tried to force out Christianity. Do you ever say to yourself “I can’t do this” in terms of evangelization, or think it’s impossible? It’s easy to pray with a four year old. It’s not too hard to pray ourselves either. But how about in the world? What do you do when your child doesn’t want to pray, doesn’t want to go to church anymore? What do you do when people mock Christian teachings in a world of relativism? What do you do when called to maybe help out in teaching faith formation in a church? What do you do when a person you know whether it’s a growing child or a relative or friend who whoever is living a life contrary to the faith? I don’t know about you but part of me would surely justify not wanting to get my hands dirty. They won’t listen to me anyway, I’m not a good speaker; he’ll just do his own thing; it’s not my place to say anything; they’ll never change; it’s none of my business anyway. It’s not as if Brother Andrew got Yassar Arrafat to embrace the Christian faith or that all Muslims he met converted. But he did get some to change, and through his actions he brought so many to Christ. Just as we hope to be in heaven one day and have God share with us the people who are there in part because of what we did, we also do not want to learn of people who were not in heaven because of what we did not do. Cowardice is a vice against fortitude. And while we can’t force feed the faith to someone, with patience,

with perseverance and remembering God is with us and gives us the tools to evangelize, there are so many people we can help. It's not up to Pope Francis to be the only shepherd of the Church; God gives us each a commission through our baptism and confirmation; go; make disciples of all the nations. We do that through our example, but also through what we say and do to our loved ones, our friends and the people we meet over our lives by remembering the Holy Spirit gives us all the power to bring others to Jesus, so let's use it.

As I shared at a daily Mass not too long ago, one of my favorite series of all time is *The Wonder Years*. And in a memorable few episodes that took place at the start of school, Fred Savage playing Kevin Arnold remembers the first day of eighth grade going from class to class. The narrator, the adult Kevin, talks about his thoughts of how easy each class would be until he gets to algebra, where he says "I'll aim for a B this year, that sounds pretty good." The instructor dives in right away, and he's intimidated. He's overwhelmed, but taking an interest in him and wanting to help him, Mr. Collins, his teacher, works with him and low and behold, it's not easy but he starts to learn math. When it's time for him to do more on his own, Mr. Collins ends the tutoring; an angry Kevin says I thought you were my friend

to which he is told I'm not your friend, I'm your teacher. His anger leads him to believe he can't do well at all and so he intentionally bombs a test. When he comes back on Monday and learns that his teacher died over the weekend, the substitute has a blank test that was left for him. He completes it after school, and turns it in saying you don't have to grade it, it's an A. God has friend-like qualities, but He's a lot more than a friend. He's even more than a teacher. He's a redeemer. And He's here to help us all become saints. So let's stop making excuses about why we can't do that, and not look at what we don't have, but what we do have, namely His love and His grace which is truly amazing, so let's use both to set our souls and the souls of one another on fire with the love of God.