

Now you may not believe it, but as I have indicated before, God has a plan and a purpose for each one of us. Because we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and have committed our lives to Him, we are expected to serve Him out of love and obedience. Thus, God has something that He wants each one of us to do for Him. The Lord is always calling us to serve Him in certain areas of ministry. The question for some of us is – what my area, what does God want me to do?

Have you heard God's call? Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between God's call and our own personal desires and plans; in other words, the difference between what we want to do and what God really wants us to do? Thus, the question is how do we know when God is calling us? So, this morning, let's look at how God has called several people in the Bible to His service and see what we can learn from their experiences. Let's start with the great prophet Isaiah's call in the sixth chapter, the first eight verses.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

The setting for this vision of Isaiah is the temple in Jerusalem, but what he saw was the majesty and holiness of a heavenly palace. It appears that while the prophet was standing in the temple, in his spirit, he was lifted up like Ezekiel, the Apostle John and other visionaries into the council of the Lord, where he saw the Lord sitting on the heavenly throne attended by winged creatures. This is sort of like in Star Trek when Captain Kirk says: "Beam me up, Scottie." For those of you who are participating in our Wednesday night class and those who attend Tony's Sunday morning class, these first few verses will remind you of John's vision in the Book of Revelation.

Now I have read this passage from Isaiah many times over the years, but it was only last month when I was reading Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest* that I realized that God's call may not have been directed to Isaiah. Listen again to verse 8: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'" In his devotional, Chambers points out that Isaiah overheard God's call; it was not addressed directly to him. Yes, Isaiah was there for a purpose, but who else was there? God had a message and was looking for a messenger. So, God issued a general call for someone to serve, and Isaiah took it personally.

The point that Chambers is making is that the call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Now whether I hear God's call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 22:14 – "Many are called, but few are chosen." That is, a few prove that they are the chosen ones. The chosen ones in this case are those who have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and hear His call. Because of their personal relationship and spending time alone in prayer and worship with the Lord, they are in tune to His voice. Another way to say this is: "Many are called, but only a few hear."

Now that's a key point; just like we can recognize the voice of a friend or loved one because we have spent time with them, so can we recognize the call of the Lord. That's why it so important to spend time alone with the Lord during our daily quiet time. We get so busy with the demands and problems of everyday life, that we can't hear God for all the external noise around us.

When the evil queen Jezebel threatens to kill him, the great prophet Elijah flees to Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19. God tells Elijah to stand on the mountain and He will pass by. Then there was a violent wind, but God was not in the wind. Next came an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire came the sound of sheer silence, and God spoke to Elijah. We tend to forget what God said in Psalm 46:10 – "Be still, and know that I am God." To hear God's voice and call, we need to spend time alone with Him; we need to remove all distractions around us and listen for His voice. We need to make a concerted effort to listen for God.

Now let's look at the call of the great Law Giver, Moses. Moses was born during the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt. In order to save his life, his mother placed him in a basket in the Nile River. He was rescued by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised as a son of Pharaoh. But when he was older and began to understand who he truly was, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a fellow Israelite, and he had to flee from Egypt. He flees into the desert where he marries the daughter of Jethro and starts tending the sheep of his father-in-law.

One day he sees a curious sight, a burning bush. As he approaches the bush, God tells him to take off his sandals, because he was standing on holy ground. Then God tells Moses that he has a small job for him. He wants Moses to go back to Egypt, where by the way he was wanted for murder, and lead the Israelites out of slavery and to the Promised Land. But unlike Isaiah, Moses does not immediately say: "Here I am, send me." On the contrary, Moses tries to get out of the assignment by coming up with excuse after excuse for not going; he really tries God's patience. Do we try God's patience by making up excuses?

Moses instantly comes up with five reasons for not accepting God's call. First, he questions why choose me; I'm not qualified. Do we ever think that; that we are not qualified for the task that God is nudging us to do. However, we must remember that God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called. As God told Moses, so He assures us that He will be with us and will help us when we are called. One of the reasons that God calls us to tasks that we may not have the background or expertise for is that God wants us to walk in faith and trust in Him. If we are too qualified, then we might tend to serve for our own glory and not God's.

Moses is also concerned that when he goes to the Israelites, they will ask him who is this God who has sent you to lead them to freedom. How will Moses describe Him? Then God responds with His greatest self-description: "I am Who I am!" If we are going to serve the Lord, then we need to know who He really is. That's where our personal relationship with Him comes in.

Let's face it, we tend to be more willing to help and serve someone we know than a stranger; that's just human nature. Is God a friend or a stranger to us?

Then Moses says that he is afraid that the people will not listen to him or believe that God sent him. He was intimidated by the task at hand, and also concerned about how the people will react. Have you ever felt that way? That taking on a new task may mean stepping out of your comfort zone and taking the risk that others may criticize you? Sometimes we get more concerned about what others think than what God thinks.

One Sunday morning, a mother went to wake her son up for church. When she knocked on his door, he said: "I'm not going!" "Why not," asked his mother. "I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "One, they don't like me. Two, I don't like them." To which his mother replied: "Well, I'll give you one good reason why you have to go to church. You're the preacher!"

Then Moses says that he is not a good public speaker; he has never been good with words, he stutters. God tells him: "Who do you think made your mouth and gave you words." God goes on to tell him that He will give him the words to speak. In John 14, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of what He has taught us. In other words, He will give us the right words at the right time. Have ever counseled or helped someone and later wondered where the words that you spoke came from? That's the work of the Spirit!

During a seminary class on preaching, the students were told to fill their mouth with marbles. Each time they gave a sermon, they could remove a marble. After they had lost all their marbles, then they were ready to be a preacher!

Finally, having exhausted all the excuses he could come up with, Moses in desperation says: "O Lord, can You send someone else?" The Bible tells us that the Lord's anger burned against Moses. If we are the right person for the job, God will not give up or take no for an answer. He will find a way to make it work. In Moses' case, God had Moses' brother Aaron to go with him and to speak for him. Here's a key point; if God wants you to serve, one way or the other, you're going to serve! God wins in the end; it's just a matter of time.

Now I can relate to this and Moses. I heard the call to ministry when I was a teenager, but resisted it and came up with excuse after excuse. I went on to get my engineering degrees and went to work for the Federal government. Then around 1996, when we were worshipping at St. John's UMC in Santa Fe, the senior pastor came to me and told me that the Annual Conference that year was meeting on Sunday. Thus, there would be no pastors in the pulpits, and he wanted me to preach that Sunday. To this day, I don't know what he saw in me to give him enough confidence to trust me with his pulpit. Well, I preached my first sermon that Sunday in two services to about 400 people, and the rest is history. This brings up an interesting observation; sometimes our call comes through other people who recognize our spiritual gifts and where they can best be used to serve the Lord.

Now it is also interesting to note that Moses was 80 years old when God called him. Thus, there is no retirement from the service of the Lord. Now I know that's not what some of you want to hear. You think that you have done your duty for the Lord and it is now time to sit back and take it easy. When I was in Grants, I preached on this point one Sunday. Following the service, Rev. Rodney Roberts, a retired Methodist minister, told me that that was most onery sermon he had ever heard.

While you may not like it, there is no age limit as to when God will call us to service. One of the best preachers that I have ever had the opportunity to worship with was Rev. Warren Latham. He heard God's call to ministry at the age of 9 years old. And he went on to serve one of the largest churches in Atlanta, Georgia. So don't think that you are too young or too old to serve God. As I said earlier, God has something that He wants each of us to do.

Now all four Gospels record Jesus calling His disciples. In the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and He sees Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea. Jesus says to them: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Then He saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were mending their nets and Jesus called them. Immediately they left their boat and their father, and followed Jesus. Jesus asked these fishermen to leave their livelihood, boats, nets, homes, families and friends, and follow Him and became fishers of men and women. Did you notice that they did not make any excuses like Moses or hold a Methodist committee meeting; they reacted immediately! Their response was like the great prophet Isaiah: "Here I am, send me!" When you truly feel the presence of the Lord, your immediate response will always be yes.

But what qualifications did these men have that made Jesus seek them out to be part of His small group? They were basically ordinary people just like you and me. Now no one believes more in ordinary folk than Jesus does. Jesus doesn't ask for college degrees, internships at Fortune 500 companies, or impressive resumes. These fishermen were hard-working men with little formal education, but they had one quality that Jesus is always looking for; they were willing to follow Him, to obey His call and to go fishing with Him. They wanted to make a difference for the Lord. It was as if Jesus said: "Give me twelve ordinary men and if they will give themselves to me, with them, I will change the world." John Wesley also said: "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they are clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth."

Many people balk at following Jesus and accepting assignments for Christian service because they, like Moses, don't feel qualified. But as I said earlier God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called. God equips each person that He calls for their unique ministry. A person should never think so much of who they are as of what Jesus can make of them. As with the disciples, Jesus sees potential in each one of us if we are only willing to let Him mold us into what He wants us to become.

Notice what Peter, Andrew, James and John were doing when Jesus called them to go fishing with Him. They were working. The call of God can come to us at any time, not only at church, but at home, at work and anywhere. The church is definitely not the only place where we are called to serve the Lord. God calls us to leave our comfortable pews, break out of our “holy huddles, and go out into the community to serve those in need. It should also be noted that God does not call only once or to only one ministry area, but will call us numerous times to different projects.

Has God been calling you? Have you found your place to serve, your niche in the kingdom of God? Mark Twain once said: “The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.” Now by place, I don’t mean just the pulpit; there are so many more opportunities to serve the Lord and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. For example, just look at all our mission projects where you can get involved, the weekly worship services at MorningStar, the choir which will resume practicing on March 9, teaching classes, helping around the church office and many other projects. This is a growing and active church; there are always opportunities to be in service to the Lord. Spend time alone with God, listen to Him and see where He is leading you. May we all respond with the great prophet Isaiah: “Here I am, Lord. Send Me!” Amen