

The Call of God Is Not All About You

by Dr. Debra J. Mumford

The call story of Moses is my favorite call story in the Bible (Exodus 3:1–4:17). When I use the word call I am referring to a path or vocation that chooses you, that summons or beckons you, versus a career or job that you choose.

Many of us are familiar with the Moses story. On what would otherwise appear to be an ordinary day, Moses woke in the morning and assumed his shepherd duties. Moses had the responsibility of shepherding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. On this day he proceeded to do as he did everyday—he led the flock to a place where they could graze. But on this day, he led them to a mountain.

While on the mountain, tending to the sheep, he saw a most curious sight. He looked at a bush and saw two things: an angel and fire. The bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. This caught his attention. As he stared at this sight, he heard the voice of God calling his name. At this point God told Moses exactly what to do. God said that God's people were suffering at the hands of the Egyptians, and God wanted Moses to go to Pharaoh and bring the people out of Egypt.

This story is my favorite story because of what Moses says in reply.

Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people out of Egypt?"

Is that not a typical response?

Doubting God's Call

For some of us, our concern as it relates to answering a call to ministry is about our inadequacies, our shortcomings. When many

of us think about ministry of any sort we think about other people in ministry who are so gifted and talented at what they do, and we compare ourselves to them and believe that we cannot measure up to them. But what Moses was about to discover was that the call of God was not all about him.

While God wanted to use Moses because he had a particular set of gifts and skills that would allow him to lead the people, the call was about more than Moses. The call of God was all about the power that God wanted to release into Moses' life, if Moses would just allow God to do so.

Moses was not sure that the voice he heard was God's. So he decided to test God just to be certain that he was talking to the true and living God.

He asked God, "Suppose the people ask me who sent me to them, what should I tell them?"

God responded, "I AM WHO I AM. Tell them I AM has sent you to them. I AM who is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, your ancestors."

We, like Moses, want to be sure that the call we feel is the call of God. We can clarify our call through prayer and meditation, searching the scriptures, and receiving affirmation of people whom we respect and trust to provide us with candid feedback.

Underestimating Our Skills

After Moses was satisfied that he was indeed talking to the true and living God, he proceeded to

provide God with a list of his fears, inadequacies, and shortcomings—reasons why he would not be a good leader of the people. Moses was afraid that the people would not believe him if he told them he was called by God to lead them out of Egypt.

So he asked God, "What if the people don't believe me when I say that God appeared to me. What if they think I am making that up (paraphrase)?"

God provided Moses with the ability to do miraculous acts. He told Moses to throw his staff on the ground, and the staff became a serpent. He told Moses to put his hand in his cloak, and when Moses removed his hand, it was white as if he had leprosy. And God told him if those two signs did not convince the people, he could pour water from the Nile on dry ground and it would become blood. Surely that would be enough to convince the people that Moses was sent by God.

As disciples of Christ, we too are able to perform some of the same acts and miracles that Christ performed and even greater ones. Often, however, our work is less spectacular



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but still miraculous. God may call us to begin a literacy program to teach adults or children how to read, which transforms their lives. God may call us to be advocates for victims of domestic violence by helping them find safe places to live and work. God may call us to pastor churches in the inner city or rural outskirts where hope is in very short supply. God may call us to be seminary professors where we have the privilege of helping shape and mold ministers. God may call us to be chaplains in hospitals. Though the daily work we do in these various ministries does not seem miraculous, through the power of God our sustained work in each of these ministries can miraculously change the lives of the people with whom we work. And if we are not careful, it can miraculously transform our lives as well.

Underestimating God

The last objection Moses gave to God was that he was not an eloquent speaker. He told God that he was “slow of speech and slow of tongue.” God, who had been very patient with Moses up to this point became enraged at this objection.

God told Moses that it was God who gave everyone the ability to speak. But God

also assured Moses that God would *teach* Moses to speak, and in the meantime, God would allow Aaron, Moses’ brother, to speak on Moses’ behalf.

Being a professor of preaching, I am particularly sensitive to this fear. Many people do not want to answer the call to ministry because they are afraid of preaching. But let me assure you that here at LPTS, just like at seminaries all across the country and the world, we teach ministers to preach. We teach you to find your unique voice and style with which to preach. But it is the power of God at work in you through the Holy Spirit that ultimately enables you. We just help provide you with some tools to get you started.

You may discern the call of God on your life in many different ways. You may not see a burning bush like Moses or be physically knocked to the ground and blinded like Paul. But you may hear, feel, or sense a yearning from within to engage in a particular work. It is wise to discern, like Moses, if that yearning is the voice of God.

If you decide that God is calling you into a ministry for which seminary can prepare you, then apply. If you feel God is calling you to other forms of ministry, that is okay too. Do what you feel God is calling you to do. Seminary may not be the right place for you. But rest assured there is a place for you. As you continue to seek God for your place in the world, God will reveal it to you.

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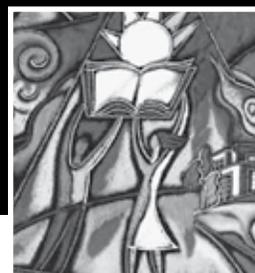
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