

God Calls Moses

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Exodus 3:1-6

Sermon Series:
Calling People to
Faith

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We are talking about the call of God to each of us. I have heard many calls in my life. I broke a lamp in the living room when I was ten, and I can still hear Mom "call" me with my full name, "Edward Stanley Ott the III!" I can hear Jim Tozer's voice calling to offer me the job that would change my life. I remember times when Ann Marie and each of my children "called" to me in good moments and in difficult ones. As Pastor Pete has been saying in this series on the Call of God, "We talk a great deal in this church about our Call-Equip-Send mission. Before we can be equipped for God's service and sent out to love and serve the Lord, we must answer God's call. How is God calling you?" That is a good question.

The story of Moses and the Burning Bush is one of the most famous experiences of the call of God on a person's life. Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Moses is a shepherd minding his own business. God often calls us when our minds are on other things. Moses was eighty-years-old at this moment, which is remarkable in itself, because in our day we tend to think of a working life followed

by a time of retirement. Yet, God had something He wanted Moses to do at the age of eighty. You can be sure that you never outlive our Lord's love for you nor His working through your life to accomplish His aims.

So Moses is strolling along, shepherding his father-in-law's animals, probably thinking about how nice a glass of ice tea would be or what he would do when he arrived home—perhaps read a book or watch a replay of last week's Redskins' game or catch a movie with his wife, Zipporah. He sees an odd sight. A burning bush! There is really is nothing unusual about that. Things do catch fire for various reasons but this was weird because the bush just kept on burning and never seemed to actually burn up. He turns to take a look. ²"There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.'"

Essentially, Moses said, "Whoa! I've got to check this out!" When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." When you become aware of the presence and call of God, there is no better response you could answer than,

Whether God calls you and me in soft moments or in more dramatic, burning bush moments, we respond the way Moses did, “Here I am, Lord! How may I serve you?”

“Here I am Lord. How may I serve you?”

“⁵Then he [God] said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ ⁶He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’”

We discover two aspects to the call of God in this story. The first aspect is the call to be aware of God’s presence and reality. The second aspect is the call to serve God. This is the first reported time in Moses’ eighty years of life that he is consciously aware of the presence of God. God may choose to reveal His presence to you dramatically and boldly as He did for Moses. Or God may make the awareness of His immediate presence a reality to you in a soft, subtle way. At one point in the prophet Elijah’s life, he was feeling rather down and despondent. He was not praying. He was just lying around listlessly. He was told that the Lord was going to come by. Elijah then witnessed a wind so violent it shattered rocks, then an earthquake and then fire, yet God was not in the wind or the quake or the fire. God met Elijah in sheer silence—softly yet clearly. Both Moses, whom God called dramatically, and Elijah, whom God called softly in the silence, were called by God when they were least expecting it, just minding their own business.

Our Lord can choose to call you now, right now—any now—to be aware of His presence and to do

what He would have you do.

Whether God calls you and me in soft moments or in more dramatic, burning bush moments, we respond the way Moses did, “Here I am, Lord! How may I serve you?”

A couple of weeks ago, we observed the sixth anniversary of 9/11, a day so vivid in our memories that we don’t need to add the year 2001 when we say 9/11. Nearly all of us recall exactly what we were doing when we heard the news. In my case, I was on a 737 class airplane taking off at 8 a.m. from Pittsburgh, heading for Los Angeles to speak to the Riverside Presbytery about congregational evangelism. The plane landed in Kansas City. As I walked into the airport, an announcement was made: “No more flights for seven hours.” I just assumed it was a control tower issue and decided to call Ann Marie just to check in with her. She answered the phone and on hearing my voice just went, “Whew!” I thought, “Wow, I’ve only been gone three hours and the lady misses me!” That’s when I learned that other airplanes heading for Los Angeles were having terrible things happen to them.

It took awhile for it to dawn on everyone that flying home was not going to be an option. I went to the car rentals and stood there, 40th in line, with little hope of getting a car, I again called Ann Marie. She said, “Call out and say, ‘Is anybody driving to Pittsburgh?’” I was a tad annoyed. I am an American male. I don’t do that! At which exact moment, a ten-passenger van pulled up to the curb, and someone hollered,

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The second facet of the call of God...is God's call to serve.

“Anybody want a ride to Cincinnati”? Primed by Ann Marie, I hollered, “I do,” because that was halfway home. The van turned out to have a group of six wonderful Procter and Gamble employees, who had been flying to Salt Lake City when their plane was ordered down in Kansas City. Out of the goodness of their heart, they were driving by the various car rental agencies to see if anybody needed a ride.

Before we started for Cincinnati, Greg York said, “We don’t know each other and I don’t want to offend you but if it would be all right with you, I think it would be appropriate if we prayed.” Everyone in the van nodded “Yes.” Up to that moment, I had been so consumed with coping that I hadn’t stopped to pray or think about God. And suddenly, vividly, powerfully, I was aware of God’s presence and reality. God had my attention. The first aspect of the call of God is the call to be aware of His presence and reality. Everyone bowed his head. “Father,” prayed Greg, “we pray for those under those collapsing buildings, for the rescue workers and the many families caught in great confusion. Be their help and guide. We pray for our president and for others in authority. We pray for our own trip.” Later, I learned several in the van were not committed Christians. Why did they eagerly agree with his suggestion of prayer? In dramatic and vulnerable moments, we are suddenly aware of the presence and reality of God—the first aspect of the call

of God. And we reply, “Here I am Lord. How may I serve you?”

Now, when God introduced Himself to Moses, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” God went on to give Moses an assignment. The second facet of the call of God we see in this story is God’s call to serve. “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

Sometimes God’s call on your life is to serve Him by doing something or saying something. Sometimes His call is to a very difficult task, and sometimes it’s easier. The call to Moses in the burning bush was clear, not cloudy, and the task was to be difficult and not easy. If you realize our God is calling you to do something, say something, attempt something, no matter the level of difficulty, hear the words of hope God offered Moses, And God said, “I–will–be–with–you” Exodus 3:12a. When God calls you to serve, He calls Himself along with you as you serve.

For most of us, God’s call to us is not dramatic in a burning bush experience but comes as we hear God’s call through the teaching of the Bible to serve Him by living faithfully, keeping our promises in life and living lives worthy of our Lord.

I once heard Tony Campolo tell the story of a friend of his from Columbia, South Carolina, by the name of Robertson McGilken. He was president of Columbia International University. His grandfather had founded the university, his

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father had been the president, and from the time he was a boy he wanted to be the president as well.

McGilken did indeed become president and, in the midst of great achievement, his wife came down with Alzheimer's disease. She lost her memory quickly. She couldn't recognize anybody, including her husband. She didn't know who he was. So his calling to lead Columbia University was set aside and he resigned as president so he could spend full-time taking care of his wife.

People came to him and said things to him such as, "What difference does it make. Your wife doesn't know who you are. Anybody could take care of her. But not anybody would do what you're doing. You are setting aside your incredible gifts to take up a role anybody could fill—anybody could do it—she doesn't even know it's you." And then the ultimate shot, "...and beside all that you are going back on your calling." Robertson replied by saying two things. First, "She may not know who I am. But I know who she is." Second, McGilken said, "One of the things that defines a calling is a promise. I made a promise to her, in health and in sickness, and that promise I will keep." Our God calls us to live faithfully, to keep our promises and to live our lives in a manner worthy of our Lord. "Here I am Lord. How may I serve you?"

Understand this. God knows who you are even when you are not sure who you are! God loves you. He has made many great and

loving promises to you and, through Jesus Christ, God will keep every one of them. So, God calls you first to be aware of His presence and reality and second to serve Him knowing He is with you in whatever He calls you to do.

Do you remember when you first heard the call of Jesus in your life? This is the call to be aware of. The presence and reality, not just of God in general, but of Jesus, God's Son, in particular and the call to follow and to serve Jesus. Some of us heard that call so early in our lives or so long ago that we have no memory of when it happened. We just know that we do believe in Jesus now and serve him as our Lord. Others of us remember exactly when and where we heard the call to come to Jesus.

My own father believed in God but never spoke of his faith and neither did Mom, though she had been confirmed in the Episcopal Church. I grew up with a belief in God but with very little understanding of who Jesus is or any specific faith in him. When I was halfway through my tenth grade year, my Dad was stationed at the Pentagon and so our family moved from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, here to Arlington. Some three weeks later, I received a phone call from a fellow inviting me to join the Explorer Scout post that met in the basement of the Little Falls Presbyterian Church in Arlington.

Since I didn't know a soul, I thought, "Why not?" and joined that scout troop, which met in the basement of the Little Falls Church. Two years later, now a senior at

When you become aware of the presence and reality of Jesus and hear his invitation to trust him and to serve him, when in your heart you accept that invitation of his, that is a burning bush moment in your life, too.

Yorktown High School, I received a phone call from Gordon Prescott, who was serving as the elder of that church in charge of worship. He said that he was in charge of the usher teams for Sunday morning and needed an usher and wondered, since I was in the scout troop, if I'd be willing to do it. I said, "Sure, I'll give it a try," and began attending church regularly for the first time in my life—passing the offering plate, counting the number of people in the pews, and in that church the pastor at the time liked the lights turned down when he preached, probably to help folk have a comfortable snooze. Turning down the lights was my job.

After I graduated from high school, I then went to Georgia Tech, where I saw a sign in the freshman dormitory. "First Presbyterian Church." I thought, "I know what Presbyterian" means, although actually I had no clue. The sign said, "Dr. Harry A. Fifield preaching. Westminster College Fellowship. Georgia Tech men. Agnes Scott women." There were 1300 men in my class and 18 women. Agnes Scott is an all-women's college. So, now you know why I am a Presbyterian! First Church sent a bus to Agnes Scott to pick up students and then to Georgia Tech before taking us to church.

Meanwhile, one day walking up the campus hill, I saw a sign stretched across the road, "Magic Show. Electrical Engineering Auditorium. Friday Night." The whole campus showed up and packed the place. The magician

turned out to be Andre Kole, a magician, illusionist, evangelist. After cutting people in half, shrinking them and other great stuff, he said, "It is time for the intermission. Everything I have done so far has been an illusion, a trick of the eye. After the break I am going to speak to you about reality and that is the person of Jesus Christ. I say this in case this is something you don't want to hear or that might offend you so that you could slip out."

I remember what we were thinking. "He's going to talk to us about Jesus Christ?" I don't recall anyone leaving. That was the first time in my life I heard someone say, "God loves you!" It was the first time in my life I heard there was stuff in my life that wasn't right, what we call sin, that my sin came between me and the life that God offers. It was the first time I heard about Jesus, his wonderful life, his death on the cross to cancel out the effect of my sin, and his wonderful resurrection. Andre Kole then said that I could receive Christ into my life and know his presence and serve him with my life. He concluded by asking, "If you would like to ask Jesus into your life and serve him with your life, I am going to pray a simple prayer and you are invited to pray it with me." All I know is that there was nothing I had ever wanted more in my life than to pray with him. A burning bush moment? You bet it was. It was my introduction to Jesus. When you become aware of the presence and reality of Jesus and hear his invitation to trust him and to serve him, when in your heart you accept that invitation of

his, that is a burning bush moment in your life, too.

“Lord Jesus, some of us may have been minding our own business this morning and have suddenly become aware of the presence and reality of Jesus in just the last few minutes. You are clearly knocking on the door of our hearts. For those of us who hear the call of Jesus, hear our prayer, “Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life and receive you into my life as my Lord and my Savior. I do confess my sin and thank you for your forgiveness and for your gift of eternal life. And now I wish to serve you in the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name, Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and want more information and someone to pray with you, please email me at stan.ott@viennapres.org!