



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

ON HOLY GROUND

BACKGROUND: EXODUS 3:1-22 • KEY PASSAGE: EXODUS 3:9-15

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PURPOSE: To help adults understand God's calling can come at any time, any place and to any one.

BIBLE STORY: God Calls Moses

MEMORY VERSE: "God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." (HCSB)

FOCUSING OUR VISION



THE CALL OF
MOSES

What does the word "call" mean? At its deepest level, call relates to discovering the purpose for our lives. Os Guinness in *The Call* offers this definition: calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service. Answering God's call is the way to find and fulfill the central purpose of our lives.

I am one of twelve children who grew up in a pastor's home in North Alabama. With great clarity I remember what I perceived to be my first encounter with God. I saw no burning bush or bright light from heaven. Instead, I sat on the front pew of First Baptist Church in Union Grove, Alabama, when God's Spirit "spoke" to me

and called me into relationship with Christ. I felt the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. On the last day of Vacation Bible School, my dad shared a simple "plan of salvation." Where I sat was "holy ground" because I encountered God there.

The call to make Jesus Lord (boss) of my life was not the only time God spoke to me and called me. My summons to full-time Christian ministry began while I attended the University of Alabama. Unlike many who participated nominally in church during college, the years at Alabama were significant ones for my spiritual journey. Engaging in Bible study and open discussions with other college students proved a rewarding experience, as God spoke to me about my future. Why God allowed me to complete a very tough degree program in Accounting if I was being called to pursue vocational ministry was a mystery to me, but God saw the bigger picture.

After college, I accepted an accounting position in Nashville, Tennessee, where I joined and became actively involved in Haywood Hills Baptist Church. God used the ministers and members of that congregation to cultivate my call into full-time Christian ministry. God culminated my calling one night as I prayed and read passages from Colossians. Colossians 4:17 leaped off the page: "Take heed to the ministry which you have received from the Lord, that you fulfill it." Those words were the confirmation I needed. The next Sunday I described my calling to my church family. Haywood Hills affirmed my discernment and licensed me to preach. Soon I made plans to attend seminary.

During the past twenty-two years (19 of them in Virginia), I have served on the staff of three churches. The call of God in my life is dynamic; not static. God still calls me to faithful discipleship and Christian ministry each day of my life.

What I described for you is my sense of call from God. God called me in a way that I could understand, but God's call can be experienced in a variety of ways. Your experience will more than likely be different from mine.

Please know "call" isn't an experience reserved only for those entering full-time Christian service. All God's children are called. Unfortunately, many believers have not yet heard or discerned God's call upon their lives. Consequently, they sit in the pews of our churches assuming others will do the work of Christ in the world. No matter how insignifi-

cant or unskilled you feel, how many personal failures you experience, no matter how physically weak you think you are, God gives purpose to your life. God's purpose for you is discovered by answering/responding to God's call.

In today's lesson, we explore the call of Moses, the great liberator. Like many of us, Moses felt inadequate to perform God's mission. He feared for his life. He feared failure. He felt weak. Yet, God chose Moses for God's mission. God relates similarly to us. We must remember it's not about us; it's about what God wants to accomplish through us. We may feel small and powerless like Moses did, but God chooses (if we allow God's Spirit free reign in our lives) to use us anyway.

I believe God still calls men and women today. Few of us are called to confront powerful kings or to commit to full-time Christian service, but the call to serve is reality in the life of every Christian. It is my prayer God will use this study about the call of Moses to enable you to hear afresh God's "call" to you.

LISTENING TO THE STORY

BACKGROUND

From the beginning, Moses plays an integral role in the Exodus story. Moses' birth comes at a risky time. The new king recently ordered all male Hebrew babies drowned. God's hand, however, is on the future liberator of the Hebrews. Moses' mother crafts a basket, places the baby in the basket, and hides him in the reeds along the edge of the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter discovers and retrieves the child and saves his life.

Later, as a young man, Moses witnesses the beating of a Hebrew slave by an Egyptian. Outraged, Moses kills the Egyptian. When Pharaoh finds out about the murder, he intends to murder Moses, so Moses flees to Midian. There, Moses finds his way to the household of a priest of Midian who later offers his daughter in marriage to Moses. While tending the sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro, Moses experiences God's summons.

THE CALL OF GOD TO MOSES IS PERSONAL

God's appearance to Moses occurs in two parts. 1) The visible aspect of the burning bush captures Moses' attention. An angel later appears to Moses (3:2) but does not speak to him. 2) The focus quickly shifts from the burning bush to what is really important—delivery of God's personal message to Moses. This message includes three elements:

1. **The Sovereign Summons (3:4):** God calls Moses by name. Moses' response, "Here I am" indicates his readiness to submit to God's will. Moses recognizes who God is and acknowledges he is God's servant.
2. **The Commanding Voice (3:5):** Moses stands in the holy presence of God. God's holiness requires respectful distance. The command for Moses to take off his sandals reflects the awe due God alone.
3. **The Identity of God (3:6):** God wants Moses to know the One who is calling him. Moses must understand this is the same God who called and spoke to his ancestors before he can respond affirmatively to the summons. Once God self-reveals, Moses appropriately hides his face—again, a sign of submission to God.

GOD'S CALL TO MOSES IS PURPOSEFUL

Now that Moses knows who called him, God reveals Moses' assignment. In verse 7, God uses three powerful verbs: "I have seen...I have heard...I have known..." God knows the injustice inflicted upon the Hebrew slaves living in Egypt. God hears the cries of the people for deliverance from slavery. God expresses concern for the suffering people of Israel. Because God sees, hears, and knows, it is clear in verse 8 that God comes to rescue his people from the hands of the Egyptians.

God is capable of delivering and rescuing the Israelites without human aid, but God typically does not work that way. Instead, God tells Moses, "I am sending you" (3:10) to secure the release of the Hebrew slaves. Moses was probably stunned when he heard God's words. Moses, not God, will meet with Pharaoh. Moses acts on God's behalf to save God's people.

GOD'S CALL TO MOSES INCLUDES THE PROMISE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Moses voices serious doubts about the mission. God wants Moses to return to a dangerous part of the world where his life is at risk to confront an immense imperial power. Moses offers five points of resistance concerning his new vocation. Each time, God assures Moses that this is God's plan. Because God controls the plan, God assures Moses he will journey with God's powerful presence. Hear Moses' objections and God's response. NOTE: We move outside the focal passage to discover all of the excuses Moses offers God.

1. **Who am I?** Moses realizes he is a nobody who lacks authority to confront Pharaoh. Moses contrasts how little he is with the massiveness of the task he is asked to perform. God responds, “I will be with you (3:12).” Moses needs the assurance of God’s presence with him.
2. **I must know the name of the one who authorizes this mission.** If Moses must go up against Pharaoh as an act of civil disobedience, he needs to know the name of the One sending him. Moses knows the call comes from the God of his ancestors, but he needs more—a personal name for that God. In 3:14, God responds, “I am who I am.” There is much debate about what this name means. The name Yahweh comes from a form of the verb “to be.” This God who calls Moses is the one who possesses the power for life—the power for being. Moses doesn’t obtain much more knowledge about the God who speaks to him, but he knows this name contains everything the Israelites need to know.
3. **I fear rejection by my own people.** In 4:1, Moses wants to know what will happen if the people don’t believe him. We hear the anxiety in Moses’ voice. He needs more than verbal assurances from God. So, God shows his power by turning Moses’ staff into a snake. Moses’ ability (in God’s power) to do signs and wonders will convince the Israelites of his credibility.
4. **I cannot speak effectively.** In 4:10-12, Moses begins to make excuses why he cannot accept God’s call. God begins to lose patience with Moses but assures him that the one who calls Moses will provide the words for him to speak.
5. **Please send somebody else.** This response by Moses angers God (4:13-17). Moses wants God to send somebody else, so God agrees to send Aaron along with him. Moses’ resistance is taken seriously by God, but God does not remove his call to Moses.

Finally, Moses accepts God’s call to be the liberator of God’s people. His willingness to say “yes” to God begins the story of the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. As a result of this divine/human encounter, Moses’ life is forever changed. When we read of Moses’ resistance to God’s call, we might think this call and his new vocation are forced upon Moses. The truth is, Moses needs to recognize (with some coaxing) that this is who God created and sustained him to be from the very beginning.

SHARING OUR CONNECTIONS

GOD’S CALL TO CHRISTIANS IS STILL PERSONAL TODAY.

God is still in the calling business today. Every person who claims faith in Jesus Christ is also called. The vocation of every Christian is to faithfully live out his/her calling wherever he/she is—at home, at work, at church, at school, at play. You may not see a burning bush or hear the audible voice of God, but somehow God calls you to a life of service. Unfortunately, many Christians spend their whole lives searching for God’s will or God’s call, never engaging in the expression of their calling by doing hands-on ministry for the kingdom. If we are connected to the vine (Jesus Christ), then we are expected to bear fruit for the kingdom of God—to continue the ministry of meeting needs that Jesus began. Jesus says the fruit we bear shows we are his disciples (John 15:5-8).

How do we discern God’s call today? Many different answers to that question circulate today. Let’s explore three tangible ways to discern God’s call:

1. Some churches have adopted a simple philosophy: If you see a need and you can meet it, God is calling you to meet it. It is God who helps you see the need in the first place. Then, God empowers you to respond to that need in the name and power of Christ. I believe this is a good starting place for those struggling to discern God’s will or call. What I like about this approach is it does not have to be programmed, and it takes away the excuse many offer, “God hasn’t called me.” God calls every Christian to carry on Christ’s ministry in the world. Christ modeled meeting needs wherever he encountered them. He calls us as his disciples to do the same today.
2. God gives us many tools to help us discern God’s call upon our lives. I like the language NETWORK (Willow Creek resource) uses to flesh out the concept of call for Christians today. NETWORK contends we discern God’s call when we discover our passion (the God-given desire that compels us to make a difference), spiritual gifts (divine endowments or abilities God gives us to make our unique contribution to the kingdom), and personality (the unique combination of traits and tendencies that makes each of us one-of-a kind). What is helpful about a tool like NETWORK is it encourages us to systematically look within ourselves to see who God made us to be. God created us, God gave us our passions, God’s Spirit poured gifts into our lives to build up the church

in love, and God gave us our unique personalities. God holds us accountable to use only what has been entrusted to us. This is a basic stewardship principle. God gives to us, and we are expected to manage our gifts for the kingdom. That is responding to God's call.

3. A saying I like is: "Sometimes you just have to throw it on the wall and see if it sticks." What this means is often we do not discover God's call upon our lives until we actually engage in a particular ministry. Sometimes we must agree to serve in a ministry role not knowing whether it is a good fit. If we find ourselves serving effectively and discover joy and fulfillment through engagement in that ministry, then God confirms our call to it. So, if you are struggling to find God's call, simply offer yourself in service. God may speak powerfully through your willingness to allow the Spirit of Christ to produce fruit in your life.

GOD'S CALL IS ALSO CORPORATE IN NATURE.

We seldom discover our gifts or talents in isolation. The call is personal but not strictly individual. Jesus' summons to his followers is also a corporate calling. God places other people in our lives who see and call out the gifts God entrusts to us. We sometimes make assumptions about ourselves that may not be accurate. A fresh set of eyes and new connections can open up new ministry vistas to us. We journey the life of faith in authentic Christian community, and God uses people to challenge us, inspire us, encourage us, mentor us, and help us. God speaks to us powerfully and personally in ways we can understand (through ministers and friends, through books and commentaries, through experiences or retreats, through creation and nature, etc.) and God speaks through the lips of people who know and love us. It is in the context of Christian community that we hear the call to put God first in our lives, and it is in community our gifts are called out and employed in service to God and humanity. As we journey with other believers, God commissions us to be Christ's ambassadors in the world.

GOD'S CALL UPON OUR LIVES IS PURPOSEFUL.

God still calls each of us because there is great need in our world God wants to meet through us (individually and collectively as the church). Moses' call was to liberate God's people from bondage. People are still in bondage to sin; God wants to liberate them through faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Our assignment is to be the presence of Christ to lonely and hurting people. God's children are hungry and homeless. God calls us to feed them and meet their human needs. People are oppressed, abused and dehumanized. God expects us to be their advocates in the public square. The Great Commission and the Great Commandment require us to put feet to our faith. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is an active experience. God still liberates humanity with people like you and me.

WE HAVE THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US.

When Jesus left this earth, he promised his continual presence with us in the form of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). When God calls and we make ourselves totally available for kingdom work, we receive the assurance of God's presence. We serve out of God's power and strength not our own. Like Moses, we connect with the dynamic power of the Living Lord. When God calls, God also equips and empowers the kingdom work designed for us. Practices of the faith remind and reassure us God is near and strong. We need only tap into God's power.

EXPRESSING OUR FAITH

The disciple life is a journey of faith. God initiates relationship with each of us and encounters us on our own personal "holy ground." We stand in awe of who God is and what God asks of us. God doesn't always show us explicitly every step to take. Faith (evidence of things unseen) plays a major role in our relationship with God. We journey with God and with fellow-believers. Each movement of faith reveals further faith risks God intends for us (individually and as Christian congregations). Moses' acceptance of God's call led him on a journey based on faith and dependence upon God.

How do we find strength for this type of journey? God wants us to cultivate an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe. The inner disciplines (or practices) of the faith nurture this relationship of trust. If you want God to guide your life, spend time communing with God through worship, prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, etc. These inner disciplines enable you to put God first in your life and to desire the things God desires. You will hear more clearly and discern God's call to faithful obedience, and only then will your gifts and passions intersect with the needs of the world.

In the words of Parker Palmer, "Let your life speak!" The great "I AM" calls and wants your life to speak for the kingdom of God.

TEACHER LESSON PLAN SUGGESTIONS

Please select and utilize the teaching/learning suggestions that best meet the needs of your class members.

GET ATTENTION:

Pray acknowledging God's Spirit as the teacher in the room. Ask for each person present to experience afresh the call of God.

Get the attention of participants by asking the following question: "How does God intend to continue the work of Jesus Christ in the world?" Note that the marching orders for the New Testament church come from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus expects those who follow him to become disciples (those who pattern their lives after the life of Christ) who then make other disciples.

Ask this follow-up question: "If the church is called to carry on Jesus' ministry in the world, why do you think less than 20% of the members in the average church do as much as 80% of the work?" The truth is we have preached a gospel of salvation disconnected from the call to discipleship and service. Those who are disciples of Jesus Christ will mature and bear fruit for the kingdom. If so few are bearing fruit for the kingdom, what does that say about the disciple-making efforts of our church? Could it be that many have not yet heard or discerned God's call upon their lives?

Alternative Opening: Share this story: The story is told of an elderly woman who was serving on her church's Nominating Committee. Efforts were underway to convert the Nominating Committee into a lay mobilization team. A discussion ensued about how the members of this committee could help church members serve out of their gifts and passions. Before long, members of the committee began talking about their spiritual gifts. The elderly lady spoke up and said, "I don't have any special gifts to help the church." Incredulous, the members could not believe what she was saying! They began telling her the gifts they observed God had given her to aid the ministry of the church. This woman was serving out of her giftedness, but she had never heard anyone affirm or "call out" those gifts. How sad she spent most of her life not fully recognizing what God created her to be and do for the kingdom. Ask: Do you know people like that who have been in church all their lives and still don't know what God calls them to do for the kingdom?

GET INTO THE WORD:

Today is "Consider Your Call" Sunday at our church. Read the definition of call by Os Guinness: Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service. Ask participants to share what they think that definition means. Note how essential it is to make our lives radically available to God if we are to fulfill the purpose for which God made us.

To help us more fully understand what "call" means, we will study the call of Moses from Exodus 3:9-15. Have someone read the focal passage.

So often we get caught up in the mystery of the burning bush that we miss some of the important aspects of this story. Share these points as statements or questions.

- The message is so important God personally delivers it to Moses.
- Without really knowing who speaks to him, Moses shows readiness to submit to God's will.
- God reveals his identity to Moses. This helps Moses realize this is the One True God of his fathers.
- What is God's assignment for Moses? [to liberate the Hebrew slaves living in Egypt]
- Why do you think God chose Moses for this awesome task? [This liberating work is what Moses is called by God to do. Moses was preserved as a baby for this task. Moses' willingness to kill an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew slave shows the passion God gave him for his own people. God created Moses to set the people free.]
- Notice how certain Moses is that he is not up to the call of God. He offers multiple excuses why God should select someone else, but none of his excuses changes God's mind. Moses realizes he is a nobody. He fears being rejected by the people he is called to liberate. Moses says he cannot accept the call because he doesn't speak well. God addresses each one of the excuses. God reveals his power to Moses, and assures Moses God will be the one working through Moses during this assignment.
- Ask participants to share how they interpret the name of the one who is calling Moses—I AM WHO I AM. [God is creator of the universe and has the power to create and sustain life. This is the name by which the Israelites will recognize Moses as God's ambassador.]

Alternative Approach: An alternative approach to discussing the text is to break up into three groups and have the

groups read and report on the three sections in the lesson materials: the call of God is personal, the call of God is purposeful, and the call of God includes the promise of God's presence.

APPLY THE WORD:

Most of us don't have burning bush encounters with God. How do you see God calling people to serve in the kingdom today? Do you have testimonies about how God has spoken to you or called you to a specific ministry?

What evidence do you see that the call of God is universal—for all of God's children? [As Christians, we are called to continue the work Jesus began. If we are connected to the vine, Jesus Christ, we will bear much fruit for the kingdom (John 15:5).]

Ask participants to respond to the suggestion: If you see a need and can meet it, God is calling you to meet it. What are the pros and cons of this approach?

Have participants respond to the second suggestion of using a tool like NETWORK to discover our passion, spiritual gifts, and personality. [Tools like this help us look inside to see who God created us to be in the kingdom. Participating in a class like this allows others to "call out" the gifts they see in us. That is an important aspect of being in Christian community. Once we discover our gifts, passions and personalities, we are then held accountable to make a difference in the world based on who God created us to be.]

Note how Moses discovered his call apart from other people. God still speaks to us individually, but God also uses the members of the church to help us discern our call. How can the members of this class help each other discover how to make the greatest impact on the kingdom of God? God still cares about people in bondage. How might God be calling you to liberate someone who is in bondage (to sin, to drugs or alcohol, to pornography, to painful childhood experiences, to cruel bosses, to an oppressive society, etc.)?

What excuses do you hear Christians making today for not hearing and responding to the call of God upon their lives? How might God respond to our reasons for not saying "yes" to God? God knows us and calls us to serve according to our gifts and abilities, and God still promises to be the One working through us. We don't serve in our own strength.

Where is your holy ground? What do you do to cultivate a dynamic relationship with the Living Lord? What practices or disciplines are helping you become radically available to God?

The Christian life is a journey of faith. God may not tell us each step to take. God reveals how we are to live through the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. A journey with God is not by sight; it is by faith! Moses did not know where his call would lead him. He had to trust God. We, too, are called to faith, obedience and trust in God.

Close with prayer asking God to confirm the call in the life of each class member.