



Sample Sermon
"You're Calling Me?"

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Excuses, excuses, excuses! We all make them when we wonder if we are up for the task that we are asked or called to do, and especially if the call comes from God. We're not so different from Moses in that respect. Moses became one of the greatest leaders in the history of Israel, but he didn't start out that way. He is known for his obedience to God and God's call, but his was not immediate obedience. He is one of our Old Testament heroes, but not even Moses would have ever dreamed that he would be known as a hero some day, given his first response to God's call on his life. So maybe we are not so different from Moses, and maybe we can learn some important lessons for life from Moses about call, commitment, obedience, and service.

Background: Exodus 1-4:1-17

Key Passage: Exodus 3:1-15

Let's look at the events that brought Moses to his call. Moses had been spared as a baby when his parents hid him from the Pharaoh who had ordered that all male babies be thrown into the river and killed. The Pharaoh feared that the Israelites would overtake the Egyptians in population and revolt and defeat them. The Pharaoh had already forced the Israelites into slave labor, making their lives bitter, and now he had issued this edict that all male babies be killed at birth. When Moses was born, his parents hid him in their home for three months. When they could no longer hide him, they placed their child in a papyrus basket and floated him down the Nile River as his sister Miriam watched. The Pharaoh's daughter was bathing in the Nile and saw the basket. When the basket was brought to her and she opened it, she saw this little Hebrew baby and claimed him as her own. Moses' sister cleverly offered to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby and went back to her own mother so that she would have the joy of caring for her child as he grew. When he was older, Moses' mother took him back to the Pharaoh's daughter, who named him Moses, and he became her son. Moses was raised in the Pharaoh's palace with all of the rights and privileges of the Pharaoh's son, but he could not stand the slave labor of his people Israel. One day he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew so he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. His deed was discovered, and the Pharaoh tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled to Midian. At Midian, Moses rescued the daughters of a Midian priest from some shepherds who were driving them away from a well. Because of this noble deed, Moses found favor in the eyes of this priest, Jethro, and Jethro gave Moses his daughter Zipporah to be his wife. Moses settled down in Midian, tending his father-in-law's sheep, but still Moses' people were slaves in Egypt and were being treated more cruelly than ever.

One day, as Moses was tending the sheep, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a burning bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire but the fire did not consume it. When God saw Moses responding to this strange sight, God called to Moses from the burning bush. Moses answered God's call with the words, "Here I am,"

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and the Lord told Moses to take off his sandals for he was standing on holy ground. This was indeed a holy moment in Moses' life though certainly he did not understand the full extent and impact of this call. God told Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have come to rescue them and take them to a land that is flowing with milk and honey." All of this probably sounded wonderful to Moses UNTIL God said to him, "So now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." I'm sending you, Moses! I'm calling you!

And so Moses' excuses begin. The first excuse: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" What credentials do I have? Why should I be the one to be the leader? I'm a shepherd of sheep not a shepherd of people. And God answers Moses' excuse: I will be with you. That's all that matters, Moses; I'll be with you.

Moses voices a second excuse: "What if I go to the Israelites and tell them that the God of their fathers has sent me to you and they ask me, "What is his name? Then what?" And God has an answer for this excuse: "Tell them that my name is 'I am who I am.' Tell them I AM has sent you to them."

Moses makes a third excuse: "What if they don't believe me or listen to me and they question if you really appeared to me?" God has an answer for this excuse as well: "What is that in your hand?" God asks. "A staff," Moses replies. The Lord says, "Throw it down." When Moses throws it on the ground, it becomes a snake. When he picks it up by the tail, it becomes a staff again. Then God tells Moses to place his hand inside his cloak. Moses does as God says and when he takes his hand out, it is leprous like snow. God tells Moses to place his hand again in his cloak and take it out again and his hand is restored. God gives Moses miraculous signs so that the Israelites will believe him when he goes to them to lead them out of Egypt.

But still Moses makes another excuse: "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, not in the past and not since you have spoken to me. I am slow of speech." I just can't talk well enough to do this, Lord." And God answers this excuse, "Who gave man his mouth? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go and I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Moses is finally out of excuses and he makes one more plea to God to be released from this call, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." At this, the Lord becomes very angry with Moses and gives him his brother Aaron to be his mouthpiece. God tells Moses, "I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do."

And so Moses is called to lead the Israelites out of bondage and into the Promised Land. That was quite an assignment. And Moses wasn't too thrilled to be called to this monumental task. Isn't that our response sometimes as well? God calls and we want to respond positively to the call because God is God. We want to please our Lord, but we make excuses too, don't we? I'm not up for the job. I don't have time for the job. There are other people who are more qualified than I am. Those other people know their Bible better than I do, and they've been Christians longer than I have. I need to study more and be more sure of my faith before I can tackle that ministry. Besides, how do I know that anyone will listen to me if I do decide to answer this call? I'm too young or I'm too old. Excuses, excuses, excuses! As we look at Moses' excuses and, most importantly, God's responses to Moses, we can see that, when God calls, God also makes some promises to us that provide us with the strength, power, love, and grace to respond to the call of ministry and act on that call.

Moses' first response to God's call was, "Who me?" Who am I that I should go? And God's response was, "I will be with you." God's promise is to walk with us in whatever ministry we're called to do--whether that ministry is to be a missionary or a Sunday School teacher or a church committee member or a deacon or a youth leader or a counselor or a pastor. God is with us. We are not alone. In Isaiah 43:1-3, the Lord says, "Fear not for I have redeemed you I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the holy One of Israel, your Savior." And Jesus would tell his disciples and us at the close of his Great Commission, "And lo, I am with you always even until the end of the age." God is with us. Christ is with us. We are not alone.

Moses' second excuse was, "When they ask me who sent me, what do I tell them?" And God's response was, "Tell them I AM has sent you." As one chorus simply states it, "There is strength in the name of the Lord; there is power in the name of the Lord; there is hope in the name of the Lord; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." In Jesus, we see an expansion of the name I AM for Jesus told us, "I am the resurrection and the life; I am the way, the truth, and the life, I am the good shepherd; I am the door; I am the light of the world; I am the bread of life; I am the vine; and I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." Not only are we promised God's presence as we are called to particular ministry or mission, but we also given the power of His name that is above every name. We serve in the power of Jesus' name.

Moses' third excuse was, "What if they don't believe me?" And God responded by showing Moses that He was equipping him for the task. "What is that in your hand, Moses?" It was the staff that he had used to shepherd his father-in-law's flock. And that staff became a snake so that Moses could miraculously show the people of Israel that God had called him to shepherd them and to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. Now there may or may not be miraculous signs in your life to convince people that you are called to a particular ministry for the Lord. But one thing is sure: if God has called you, God will also equip you for the task. Many people have given testimony of words spoken that have been spirit-led and spirit-filled and tasks accomplished in remarkable ways that only God could have orchestrated. That is because God equips the called. And God will give you what you need to do the work to which you have been called.

Moses' fourth excuse was that he was slow of speech. We don't know if he stuttered or stammered or talked slowly or felt unsure about speaking in front of people. God reminded Moses that he had made Moses' tongue and would help him speak and teach him what to say. Sometimes we think that we have a handicap that cannot be overcome. Maybe we lack confidence, maybe we're shy, maybe we have a learning disability, maybe we feel that we cannot speak in front of people. If God has called you, God will take care of whatever problem is holding you back from accepting that call. Several decades ago, there was a young man who accepted Christ through the witness of his co-workers. He was married and the father of three young children. Soon the whole family was involved in a local church. This man went to Sunday School and was completely devastated when he was called upon to read scripture. You see, he had stuttered since childhood and was embarrassed to speak or read in front of the class. Yet, he hung in there in Sunday School and soon he was reading and participating in the class discussion. About a year later, he was asked to teach a Sunday School class. Still he stuttered but his Christian friends were understanding; they loved their new Sunday School teacher. One day during the worship service, this man knew that God was calling in him to preach. And he questioned God, "You want me to be a preacher the way I talk?" And he knew in his heart that this is what he must do. He quit his good job with all of its financial security and benefits, sold all of his family's belongings, and moved his family to seminary. He studied and grew in his faith and in his assurance of God's call and purpose for his life. He became a fine and gifted preacher, and his stuttering completely disappeared! Just as God had promised Moses, God helped this preacher speak and taught him what to say. It doesn't always happen like that, but if God calls, God will equip you for the task.

Finally Moses said, 'Lord, please send somebody else.' God couldn't send anyone else because Moses was God's choice to deliver the Israelites from the bondage of the Egyptians. Maybe you are the only one for the task to which God has called you. Maybe there is no one else to do this work for God like you can do it. God has chosen you, and your heart will be restless until you have responded to the call of God on your life.

A United Methodist minister tells the story of her call to ministry. As a toddler, she would pull herself up to the coffee table where the big family Bible was kept and open that Bible. She was drawn to that Bible. As a preschooler, she would line her dolls up and "play church" by preaching to her dolls. She wanted to go to church more than she wanted to go to school. She stayed active in church throughout her elementary and high school years and felt God pursuing her for ministry, but she decided to pursue careers that would offer professional and financial success. She became a business major but she couldn't do the math. She became a psychology major but she couldn't handle statistics. Finally, she gave in to God's call on her life, became a religion major, and then entered Seminary. Just weeks after she was ordained, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. She continued to pastor a church for five years until her health became an issue. She now

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ministers as a volunteer in her church visiting the sick and the aged. This woman had a calling on her life from childhood. She tried to do anything else, but God knew what she needed to do. And when she responded, God blessed her richly. Even with her illness, she still must minister because God has called her, and she can do nothing else. Truly, she has found fulfillment and joy in her calling. Her ministry is a calling, not a job. Max Lerner says that "a mere job has three characteristics; (1) We want to get it over with the least possible effort. (2) We want to finish it in the shortest possible time; and (3) We want as much pay as possible. On the other hand, a calling is something you could no more help doing than you could keep from breathing." (Robert J. Hastings: *Hasting's Illustrations*, p. 69)

Is God calling you? And are you making excuses? Perhaps you need to remember that God is with you, giving you strength and power in His name, equipping you for the task. So, stop making excuses, my friends, and see what God has in store for your life, and you'll find purpose, fulfillment, and joy in your calling! And that's a promise!