

BIBLE STUDY

The 2016 edition of **CALLED** is a vocational discernment resource produced by **The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry** as part of the **Young Clergy Initiative**. **CALLED**'s purpose is to help create a culture of call in each local church by offering a variety of resources to engage a variety of ages in a variety of contexts.

Other **CALLED** resources include:

- Sunday school curriculum for children grades K-5
- Support graphics for K-5 Sunday school curriculum
- Sunday school curriculum for youth grades 6-12
- Small groups discussion guide
- Bible study for young adults and adults
- Presentation/Worship background graphics
- Resource logo and support graphics
- Commitment card
- Sermon starters
- Call story videos
- Liturgical helps
- Introduction to Vocation video

This early edition of the **CALLED** Bible Study was released to the Great Plains Annual Conference in support of their Orders and Fellowship gathering in February 2016.

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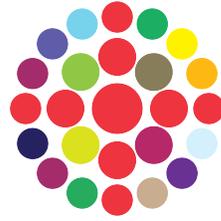
HIGHER EDUCATION & MINISTRY

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Day 1

THE CALL OF MARY



This week we are going to explore the call of Mary the mother of Jesus. Though at first glance Mary's call is beyond anything anyone has ever experienced, it is not too far from many people's story. Here in the beginning, before the Resurrection, before the trial, before the walking on water, before her son turning water into wine, we have a young woman who receives incredible news.

Before you read the passage for today's study, do your best to set aside all you know about how this story turns out in the future. Do your best to place yourself back in time with this young woman who has yet to know the man Jesus. Try to experience this as a new story.



Luke 1:26-38

Though the particularities of this call are completely over-the-top, the call itself is somewhat normal and relatively common.

**Mary's call is a call heard by
many women and men alike:
the call to be a parent.**

When you were reading, what phrase stuck out to you?

What did you notice that you hadn't necessarily paid attention to before?

What kinds of thoughts would (or did) run through your mind if you were in Mary's place?

Taking all of the details together in this passage without knowing what lies ahead, how do you think you would have reacted?

There are many ways we see God communicate God's will to people in the Bible. How does God's choice to send an angelic messenger, as opposed to communicating another way, change this interaction?

Have you ever considered the desire to be a parent a "call" from God?

Christians often consider the experience of realizing that God wants them to be a professional minister as a call from God. Some even consider that all our vocational discernment could be thought of as an opportunity to hear the call of God on our lives. However, part of what Mary's story teaches us is that the idea of "call" can be extended to many other areas of our life.

To be clear, every time God speaks to us is not a "call" from God, but this story does allow us to broaden our understanding of the word to encompass much more than God asking some people to choose ministry as a career.

What other areas of life besides vocation and parenthood could be understood as an opportunity to hear God “calling” us to something?

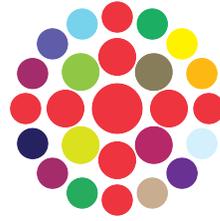
What areas of your life do you feel that God has “called” you to? How have you responded?

Beyond the extraordinary particularities of her story, Mary’s example to us is one of an obedient follower. Though she is faced with an overwhelming task made even more incredible by the particularities revealed to her by the angel, she has a beautiful response. She said, “I am the Lord’s servant,”...“May your word to me be fulfilled.”

As you close out this time, spend the last few moments in prayer. Before saying anything, consider your own experience of God’s call in the past and in the present. Little by little, begin to reach towards Mary’s answer. May you grow in your faith to the point that you can honestly say, “I am the Lord’s servant, may this call to me be fulfilled.”

Day 2

THE CALL OF MARY



Though we often talk about God's call as the event that happens at the beginning of a story, God's call is not a moment but a seed we have been asked to nurture in our life. Whether it is a child in our home or a professional vocation, God's call is more than a moment.

Long after the initial revelation, we often experience a turning point that changes how we relate to the call. That happens in a major way for Mary. There is a moment where a dramatic shift happens in her relationship with Jesus. Take a moment to read this passage paying special attention to the shift at the beginning of verse 51.



Luke 2:41-52

Up until this point in the Jesus story, Mary and Joseph are the subject of the action. They are the ones listening, responding, moving, waking up, and returning home. That all changes on this family trip to Jerusalem. Here we see Jesus with a will of his own, and by the beginning of verse 51 Mary and Joseph are the ones following Jesus back home to Nazareth. We see the call of Mary changing. She is still his mother. She still has work to be done, but it is a different kind of work.

What part of the scripture seemed more true-to-life for you as you read it?

What memory from your own life did it bring to mind?

How do you think the dynamics of Jesus' relationship with Mary and Joseph changed after this trip to Jerusalem?

Mary was clearly still called to be Jesus' mother. How do you think her experience of that call changed at this point?

It seems clear from Mary and Joseph's reaction that they were somewhat surprised at this moment. Though every parent knows that the call to parenthood will at some point result in a more autonomous child, it is not uncommon to be surprised when this begins to happen. That kind of unexpected change happens in every call. As our call grows and matures it begins to look different than we initially envisioned.

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Where have you experienced that in your own life? When has a task, role, or job surprised you by changing?

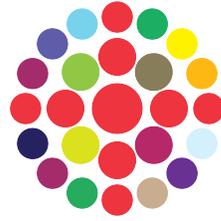
How did you respond?

Though changes and development in our call can cause anxiety, that is the natural, healthy progression. Again in this story we see the appropriate response to that moment. Joseph and Mary don't disown Jesus; rather, they begin to live into the new reality of their ongoing call to parent Jesus. Now they begin to follow him.

Take a moment in your prayer time to look over your life and the different areas in which you are responding to God's call. What changes are happening in your call? What actions will change as a result? How can you respond to these developments like Joseph and Mary? How can you continue to follow Jesus even in these changes?

Day 3

THE CALL OF MARY



God does not always call us to the easy. In fact, many times, the path of God leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. We like to imagine that the future of any call is all sunny days sweeping the clouds away, but that is rarely the case. That is far from Mary's story. Though the angels brought good tidings of great joy, that joy would come at great personal pain for Mary.

We are about to wade into some of the most painful moments in the entire Bible. However, our experience of it pales in comparison to what it must have been like for Mary. Before you open the scripture today, do your best to let go of your own perspective and try as hard as you can to experience it as Mary the mother of Jesus experienced it.



John 19:17-27

How did looking at this through Mary's eyes change or enhance your perspective on this passage?

Which of the elements would have been the most painful for you to experience were you Jesus' parent?

Knowing the full scene with the crowds and the soldiers and the thieves, how would you have responded?



Have you ever considered the idea that God might call you into painful situations? What could be some reasons that God would call us to tasks that include moments that hurt deeply?

Following God's call is difficult, the path can lead through very painful places. It can include interactions with evil people, and bring us to places where we have to witness people we love being hurt without being able to stop it. That was Mary's story, that is our story. Once again we have an example of how God wants us to live. Mary does not run away as we often desire to do in these moments. She doesn't reject God's call. She stays there to the very end. She sits in that painful place at the foot of the cross.

Following God's call is difficult, the path can lead through very painful places.

When in your life has following God's call or obeying God's command caused you pain? How did you respond?

It is important to note that we are not called to lay back and be abused. In fact, the Bible says that "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." (1 Timothy 1:7) We can have strength and stand up for ourselves.

How do you make that call? When do you sit in the painful place and when do you stand up and fight to stop it?

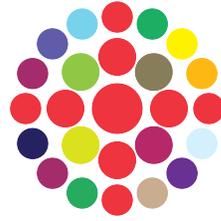
Sometimes we do not even have an option in a given moment to stand up and stop it. Mary certainly didn't have the ability to stop Jesus' crucifixion. She had to endure it. In that moment we must trust that God's call is greater than our pain. We have to trust that God can even use our suffering to accomplish the promise of our call.

John Wesley understood this. He understood that following God was a mixed bag and required obedience and self-sacrifice. As you pray today, close that time with Wesley's covenant prayer. May you have the courage to make these words the prayer of your heart:

*I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant, which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.*

- Wesley Covenant Prayer adapted by John Wesley

Small Group Reflection
THE CALL OF MARY



Before reflecting on your thoughts over the past week, take a moment to recall the main points of the Bible passages read this week.

What elements of the stories caught your attention? What pieces of the narrative had you never fully considered?

Take a moment to share a story from your own life that connects with one of the three passages we read this week. How does what you experienced help you understand Mary's story? How does Mary's story help you see your story in a different light?

Mary's call to be a mother broadens our typical concept of what a call from God can mean in our life. What things do you now consider being a call from God that you didn't before?

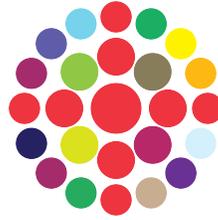
How have you seen a call of God on your life change in ways you didn't anticipate at the beginning?

When in your life have you felt that God's call led you through a painful moment or season? How did you get through it? What good came from it?

As you close your small group time in prayer, ask God to open your eyes to all the ways in which God's call is manifest in our lives. Ask God to open the ears of your heart to hear God's voice clearly.

Day 1

The Call of the Samaritan Woman



For whatever reason, we tend to think that there is some holiness bar above which people must exist before God will call them. If we are completely honest with ourselves, there are entire categories of other people we would assume God would not call. That list is a complex mix of our cultural biases and personal history and may even be something you would never share with others.

That is what is happening with the woman at the well. There is a massive history of bias against this woman's entire people: the Samaritans. The division between the Jews and the Samaritans began centuries earlier when the Assyrians took over the region. When they did that, they deported most of the Jews from Samaria and moved many Assyrians into the area that was formerly occupied by the Jewish people. The Assyrians brought with them polytheistic worship and added Yahweh to their long list of gods. Over time, all the other gods stopped being worshipped leaving Yahweh as the one God of that area.

There are entire categories of other people we would assume God would not call.

When the Jews returned and wanted to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans wanted to help since they felt they were worshipping the same God. The Jews did not see it that way. They saw the worship of the Samaritans as unfaithful and refused to allow them to help with the rebuilding of the temple. All of that smoldered until by the time Jesus arrived, there was widespread (though not universal) animosity.

All of this history means that there is massive tension in the story that results from Jesus just walking through Samaria much less ministering there. His actions are meddling with the live wires of religious-based discrimination. As you read, pay careful attention to the tension between the words.



John 4:1-12

What point in this passage did you feel the most tension in the story?

Knowing the historical background, what do you think the woman is thinking of Jesus (who is obviously a Jewish rabbi) as she walks up to the well?

We often imply a lot more by our words in a tense situation. What else do you think the Samaritan woman is saying when she says “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” in verse 9?

Jesus is breaking barriers by even speaking with this woman, but he is not doing it to start a fight. He is doing it in love. When have you experienced someone doing that in your world? When have you seen the tension of someone crossing boundaries out of love rather than hate?

Whatever the woman thought of herself, their culture made it clear that the God of a Jewish rabbi would never reach out and call an unholy, unclean Samaritan. However, that was never God’s plan.



Genesis 12:1-3

God’s call to Abram has “all peoples on earth” as the ultimate target. It is clear throughout the Bible that any cultural bias that excludes people from the community of faith is contrary to the plans and purposes of God. That is why over and over again, God calls people to break down those barriers and challenge those cultural biases.

Though it can be very hard, God calls us to break down those walls in our own life as well. Jesus wants to cross into the Samaria of our own hearts and break down the walls we use to separate ourselves and others from the community of faith. This can be very difficult to look honestly on our own prejudices.

Take a moment and reflect. Where are the walls in your mind? What categories of people do you think God would not use or call in general? Are there certain ages, races, economic levels or sexual orientations that are kept at arms length in your own mind?

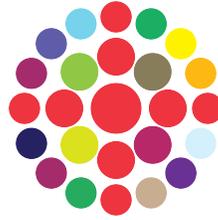
How might God be calling you to cross those borders and reach out to those people?

What is a first small step you could take to allow the Spirit to break down the walls in your own heart?

Far too often we think of prayer as all the words that exist between “Dear God” and “Amen” when prayer is as much a time to hear from God as speak to God. As you end your time in prayer, try to listen more than you speak. Ask God to show you the barriers and the way forward.

Try beginning your prayer with the words of Psalm 139:23-24: “ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Then, listen.

Day 2
The Call of the Samaritan Woman



One of the pieces we didn't explore in day 1 was an important detail John gives us at the beginning. He tells us that Jesus arrives in the middle of the day sometime around noon. Women of this time period would have commonly collected water in the morning time and later in the day when they didn't have to face the midday desert heat. Right away when we read that there is a woman coming to draw water at the well at this time of day, we know something is up.

More than the fact that she is doing hard work in the midday sun, the bigger mystery is why she is coming to this particular well on the outskirts at all. She would have passed by a couple of wells on her way to this one. These wells would have been in-town and meant doing the hard work of getting water around others, but would avoid a long walk. There is clearly some pain in this woman's life that is causing her to endure a whole lot of extra work so that she can avoid the people in her town.

It is into that pain that Jesus travels. Jesus is about to touch a wound this woman has guarded at great personal cost. When you read this passage, pay attention to how Jesus navigates the woman's defenses to get to the pain she has been protecting.



John 4:13-26

How does Jesus handle the woman's defenses? How does he move into her pain?

What surprised you about the passage?

The conversation between Jesus and the woman is interesting. It moves right from Jesus touching the pain into another discussion about how Jews have separated the Samaritans from fully worshipping God. It is as if John is trying to show us how the woman's pain is separating her from God in the same way it has separated her from her community.

How do you think it would affect someone's life to feel like their bad choices and the abuse they have received from others has disqualified them from relating to God and their community? What kinds of actions/choices do you think that would fuel?

Who in your life do you know that has gone through that kind of separating shame? How did they respond? How did you respond?

This passage ends with evidence of transformation and healing. Through this interaction with Jesus, the woman at the well has been able to see what few in the Gospels see: Jesus is the Messiah. Even more surprising and unique, Jesus explicitly confirms her perception. This is an amazing, repeating theme in the Bible. God reveals himself to people that no one would think deserve that kind of experience with God. We can all feel that way. We can all feel that our actions disqualify us from God's call.

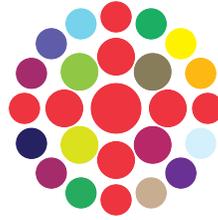
God reveals himself to people that no one would think deserve that kind of experience with God. We can all feel that way.

What is there in your life or past that you feel somehow disqualifies you from service?

How have you protected those wounded places? What is your version of the woman's mid-day trip to the well?

By naming all of the woman's transgressions Jesus is claiming all of her. He is saying that I know all your dirt and still want a relationship with you. God is calling the woman at the well. God is calling a woman who is broken and ashamed. God is calling a woman who feels her actions have disqualified her from deep spirituality, and God is calling you. Take a moment in your prayer time to experience God claiming all of you.

Day 3
The Call of the Samaritan Woman



This woman has been on a wild roller coaster. Having had a Jewish rabbi cross over massive cultural boundaries only to touch on her most sensitive pain ended in one of the most dramatic revelations in the Bible. This woman hears from Jesus' own lips that he is the Messiah. But nothing prepares us for the particularly difficult nature of this woman's call.

As you launch into the end of this dramatic story, be careful to be aware of the wild ride that has led to this point.



John 4:27-42

When you were reading, what phrase stuck out to you? What did you notice that you hadn't necessarily paid attention to before?

If you were the woman in the story, what would be different about how you reacted?

How would you have felt as one of the townspeople? Would you have been some of the first to go meet Jesus at the well, or would you have stayed back and been some of the people who heard him after he stayed around?

This woman's call could be one of the more difficult calls in the Bible. She is not asked to leave where she is and follow Jesus on the road recounting her wild story. She is called to go back into her town. She is called to minister to the people who have gossiped about her past and been part of her pain.

**We feel the pull of our call within our heart
whether or not it has been spoken to us
in audible words.**

What about this call do you think was the most difficult? Would it be going back to the man in her house, welcoming the gossips, ministering to those who had major roles in her wild past, or something else?

Many times God does not call us out of the mess of our families or communities. Often, God calls us to return to them and live out our messy spiritual journey with the people who know us well. How could God be calling your back home?

What would be your version of the woman's testimony? What is your version of "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did?"

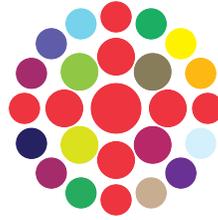
One of the things that is particularly interesting is that Jesus never asks the woman to go back. After Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah and the disciples return, the woman goes right back into town and starts calling people to come meet Jesus.

That's one of the ways we experience a call of God. It is not explicit. Many times there is no voice from the heavens or friend that speaks God's call to us over coffee. Instead, we have an experience with God, and it is clear what we must do as a result. We feel the pull of our call within our heart whether or not it has been spoken to us in audible words.

When you think about your life with God, what call do you feel within you?

As you finish your time in prayer today, take a moment to listen to how God might be calling you right where you already are. How is God asking you to return home?

Small Group Reflection
The Call of the Samaritan Woman



Before reflecting on your thoughts over the past week, take a moment to recall the main points of the Bible passages read this week.

What elements of the stories caught your attention? What pieces of the narrative had you never fully considered?

Take a moment to share a story from your own life that connects with one of the three passages we read this week. How does what you experienced help you understand the woman at the well's story? How does the woman at the well's story help you see your story in a different light?

The woman at the well is a clear example of a type of person (both racially and personally) that most people in Jesus' world would not have considered worthy of receiving a call of God. Who does your culture place in that category? What are the inherited attributes that people see as excluding them from the community of faith? What are the life choices people can make to place them on the outskirts of faith in your culture?

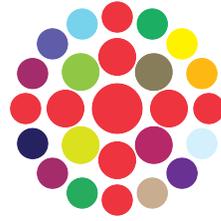
Jesus not only crosses the walls created by prejudice, he also crosses the walls created by the woman's past. How could Christians in your city do the same for the list you came up with in the previous question?

The woman was called to her hometown. What would be difficult about that for you? How receptive do you think people are in general to receiving that call?

As you close in prayer as a class, focus on the women at the well in your culture. Pray for those outsiders, and how you might be called to reach out to them.

Day 1

THE CALL OF PETER



The Bible is full of real people and real situations. There are moments when someone blurts out something off the wall at an inappropriate moment. There are times when people completely overreact and embarrass everyone there. And there are moments when the holiest people cut up and tell jokes. However, we often read the Bible as if we are reading a story of a bunch of perfect people who are chronically serious.

Today we are going to look at a story from the life of the disciple Peter that gives us an idea of his imperfection and offers us the perspective we need to understand how interesting his moment of call is. As you read the Bible passage today, be sure to see the humor and awkwardness of the story.



Matthew 17:1-8

Where was the awkwardness in this story?

If you had to rephrase God's response to Peter (verse 5) in your own words, how would you say it?

Jesus knew who Peter was and how he had a habit of destroying holy moments by saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Even though he knew that, Jesus brought Peter to the mountaintop. What do you think was Jesus' reason for inviting Peter to go to the top of the mountain?

How would you have felt if you were James or John? How would you have reacted? What face would you have made at Peter?

It is obvious throughout the Gospel accounts of Peter that he wasn't the disciple that was most knowledgeable about proper procedure in religious situations, and it is clear that the filter between his brain and mouth needed a good bit more development. However, none of that disqualified him in the eyes of Jesus. He was not shunned or excluded from important meetings; rather, he was one of Jesus' closest disciples to the very end.

Jesus continued to invite him along as a close disciple even though he said or did the wrong thing over and over again

Did you ever have a moment where you said something completely inappropriate or off the wall that destroyed the mood? How did you react?

How do you think Peter felt after Jesus continued to invite him along as a close disciple even though he said or did the wrong thing over and over again?

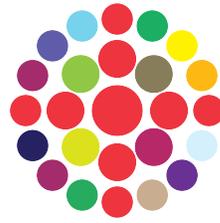
What do you think makes it difficult for people to accept that Jesus continues to love us and speak to us even when we say or do inappropriate things?

If Jesus calls Peter despite his imperfection and underdeveloped filter between his brain and mouth, what do you think could disqualify you from being called by God?

As you end your time in prayer, ask God to forgive you for the moments that you allowed yourself to think that who you are or what you've done or said somehow has disqualified you from experiencing a call from God. Ask God to help you open your ears with new confidence to hear God speaking.

Day 2

THE CALL OF PETER



People like Peter can be their own worst enemy. Though they are engaging as deeply as all the other people in the room, their personality and lack of self-control make them appear as if they are not engaging deeply or paying attention at all for that matter. Then, in a brief moment of clarity, the fog clears, the wrong words fade into the background of their mind and a couple of phrases of brilliance escape their lips.

It is that moment in Peter's life that we are journeying into today. This is definitely on the highlight reel from Peter's days with Jesus, and it is the moment at which he receives a clear call from Jesus. As you read the passage today, be sure to read it in light of what we read yesterday. This is the goofy, unfiltered disciple that is about to reveal his true depth.



Matthew 16:13-20

Based on yesterday's reading, what might you expect Peter to say when Jesus asks him "Who do you say I am?"

What do you think the other disciples thought about Peter's response when he said it? How do you think that perception changed after Jesus' response?

How do you think Peter felt as a result of Jesus' response (hint: read Matthew 16:21-23)?

What do you think Jesus was calling Peter into in verses 24-27?

How have you felt when you experienced the perfect storm of clarity and said something legitimately brilliant?

Yesterday we talked about how Jesus sees us and accepts us for who we are. But that's not what is powerful about Peter's call. Yes, Jesus sees us as we are, but he sees more than that. He sees who we could be. He sees who we should be, and he calls that person into being.

Jesus calls Peter something he is not and then uses that as a basis for Peter's larger call: to be a key leader in the establishment of Christianity.

That is what happens here. Probably one of the last words we would use to describe Peter up to this point is "rock." He has absolutely no attributes that fit that description. He is loud, unaware of what is happening around him, and clearly unqualified for his current position. He is not a rock, yet Jesus calls him that. Jesus calls Peter something he is not and then uses that as a basis for Peter's larger call: to be a key leader in the establishment of Christianity.

When was a moment when someone saw something good in you that no one else did?

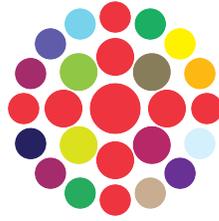
What kinds of things have you sensed about yourself that others would not believe? What kinds of things might God be calling you to that are far greater than your past action or present personality indicates?

Peter doesn't magically change into "the rock" overnight. He wakes up the next morning much like he was the morning before that. However, he knows something new about himself. He knows where he is headed. How can your sense of call help you see what decisions to make today?

That is what God wants to do for you. God wants to speak something into existence that is not there and guide you into becoming that person over the next several years of your life. As you pray today, take lots of time to listen. Where is God calling you?

Day 3

THE CALL OF PETER



There is the incredible moment when you hear the call from God grow into something new and exciting, something beyond where you are now. Then, there is the moment after that and the moment after that. If we allow God to guide us and shape us, at some point we look around and find that we have arrived at our destination. We have completed medical school and residency. We have finished seminary and are ordained. We have received the first copy of our first published work in the mail.

What happens next? Where do we go? When we arrive at the point we envisioned as the moment of completion, when we have become a completely different person than we ever thought imaginable, what happens next? That is the moment we will be reading in the life of Peter today. After Jesus calls him to be the “rock” of the church, after Peter denies Jesus three times by the fire on the eve of the crucifixion and then is forgiven three times on a beach after the resurrection, it is time for him to live into the next phase.



Acts 1:12-26

How does the Peter we encounter in this passage differ from the one we have experienced in the others we have read?

If you had to pick out a single phrase or sentence from this passage to illustrate the change in Peter, what would it be?

The room was filled with people who had lived for years with the former version of Peter. What do you think was going through their mind?

If you didn't know about Peter's past peculiarities, would that change how you see this passage?

Here, for the first time, we get to see the rock that Jesus was talking about. In the whirlwind that followed Jesus' ascension into heaven, Peter was not caught up in the drama. He did not surrender to the runaway, emotion-driven ideas in his head. He was calm and collected. He saw the next thing that needed to be done and he took action.

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Peter has become the person Jesus called him to be. Now, the nature of his call changes in orientation but not in focus. Peter is no longer striving to become the person Jesus saw. Now, he is striving to use the person Jesus' saw to build the kingdom of God.

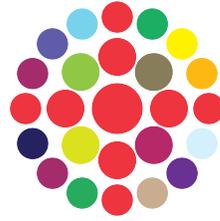
When have you experienced the sense of arriving at a growth destination you have been waiting to achieve? How did that feel?

In the pieces of God's call you have discerned to this point, where would you say you are on the journey? Are you closer to the beginning? Are you nearing the moment at which you have become the person required by the call and are shifting your orientation? Or, are you walking in the new reality already?

What are your next steps in following the call of God in your life? How does the life of Peter help you understand what to do next?

As you end your time in prayer, ask God to show you where you are on the path of the different calls you sense. Ask God to reveal to you where to go from where you are. May you be able to break through the emotional craziness of your life like Peter and courageously walk into your call.

Small Group Reflection
THE CALL OF PETER



Before reflecting on your thoughts over the past week, take a moment to recall the main points of the Bible passages read this week.

What elements of the stories caught your attention? What pieces of the narrative had you never fully considered?

Take a moment to share a story from your own life that connects with one of the three passages we read this week. How does what you experienced help you understand Peter's story? How does Peter's story help you see your story in a different light?

Though it is not surprising that a disciple of Jesus received a call from God, no one would have pegged Peter as the main guy going forward. However, Jesus could look past the outward awkwardness and see something bigger inside Peter. What kinds of outward signs distract people in your culture and make them limit in their mind the potential of people around them?

What does it take to look past those things in others and see what is on the inside?

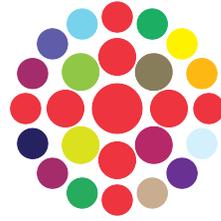
We have a tendency to internalize others' perceptions of us. When we repeatedly hear the same observation about our personality from the people around us, we believe it. Whether or not it is true, it can affect our behavior and perception of ourself. How do we break out of that? How can God's call help us do that?

What is something simple your group could do together or individually over the next week to help people hear the calls of God in their life and let go of negative external perceptions?

As you close in prayer, ask God to help each of you shed the negative perceptions you have been given by others and see the bigger person God is calling into existence. Ask God to help you be an agent of his call in the lives of the people around you, inviting them to be more than they are.

Day 1

THE CALL OF MOSES



Moses's call is such a commonplace fixture in our Biblical storytelling; we can forget how odd and unique it is. Moreover, the particular version of Moses that has most stuck in our mind (the animated one, the Charlton Heston one, etc.) can color our view of the story and cause us to miss some of the rich details.

As you read the short selection for today, try and live in each moment. Moses is working in a desert climate. It is cold in the night and mornings and hot in the afternoons. He is tending livestock for his wife's father. He is doing all of this after being raised in opulence as if he were a son of Pharaoh in Pharaoh's home. Do your best to walk step by step with Moses, and don't jump ahead. Rest in each moment.



Exodus 3:1-3

What did you notice that you had not noticed before? What stuck out as you read it carefully?

Moses was in a desert. This was definitely not the first burning bush he had seen. However, he took the time to stare at it and pay attention to the way it was burning. This as well as other pieces of his story indicate that he had a more contemplative, introverted personality. How does this change your perception of Moses?

How do you think you would have reacted to seeing another burning bush in the desert while you were at work?



When Moses left to investigate the bush, he was leaving his responsibilities of his job tending the livestock. Without knowing what happens afterward, would you think this is a good idea? Would you have done the same?

We pass over this moment in the story far too often. We don't spend enough time learning the lesson of the burning bush. Yet, without the burning bush, there is no call of Moses. So much hinges on this one moment, and what happens in this moment is amazing. Moses is fully present in his world. He not only notices the bush but also considers it. He ponders what he is seeing for long enough to see that there is something different.

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Then, Moses goes further. After noticing something odd, he does not allow himself to get pulled back into the pressing demands of his life at that moment. Instead, he rests there and moves away from the voices in his head telling him he needs to pay attention to the flock under his care. Instead, he walks over to the bush to consider it more deeply. There is more instruction for our daily lives in this single moment than in the entirety of many self-help books.

How present are you in your daily life? How are you at noticing the important details in the chorus of stimuli in your life?

There is something beautiful about the fact that God doesn't try to get Moses' attention by using some religious symbol. He calls to him through an every day sight: a bush. When have you experienced God speak to you in a decidedly non-church setting?

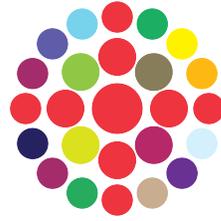
Where in your everyday world might you have missed God speaking to you? Where have you never thought of the voice of God appearing?

What kinds of things do you need to do to be more aware of God in your everyday world?

Being spiritually present in everyday moments is difficult. As you end your time in prayer today ask God to speak to you in everyday moments and help you be present enough to hear God’s whispers above the shouts in your life.

Day 2

THE CALL OF MOSES



Sometime God calls us to things that remake us into something new, and sometimes God calls us to things that make us tremble in fear. Today, we dive into the specifics of Moses' call, and it is no small task that God places before Moses.

As you read, remember the contemplative, introverted man that sat and considered the nature of a burning bush. Remember how he was one of those people who were present in all kinds of different situations.



Exodus 3:4-20

What did you notice in the story as you read it with Moses' personality in mind? How did his personality change the way you perceived the events in the passage?

Moses seems to try to get out of this call several times. Where did you sense that in this passage? Where was Moses looking for an excuse?

How do you think Moses was feeling when he was trying to get out of the call?



How would you have reacted to what went down in this passage? Would you have accepted this call?

This is one of the biggest tasks God asks anyone to accomplish in the Bible. Moses is not only going to be asked to reject the family that raised him. He is not only asked to be the leader of an entire nation of people. He is also being tasked with leading a revolution against the most powerful country in the world. It's a tall order to be sure, and it's not surprising that he tries to get out of it.

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Have you ever been asked to do something that you thought was more than you could handle? How did you react?

When was a moment when you accomplished something you never thought you would be able to do?

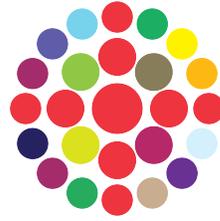
If you were in Moses' place, would God's responses to your concerns have been enough to make you feel good about saying yes?

There was a very real possibility that Moses could be executed for what God was asking him to do. How does that change the way you see Moses' actions and God's call?

As you end in prayer, take time to open yourself up to the bigness of God. What might God want you to do that is scary? What call might God have on your life that pushes you far outside your comfort zone?

Day 3

THE CALL OF MOSES



We have sat with Moses as he considered the burning bush, and we have heard God calling Moses to something that put everything Moses had and held dear at risk, including his own life. We have heard Moses object to his call, and we have heard God respond to those objections with clear answers.

Now we come to Moses' final objection. It is an objection that reveals even more about who Moses is. We will get a glimpse of Moses' shame and see what weakens his self-esteem. As you read, be careful to see a real person rather than a cardboard cutout you remember from childhood. Enter into this story and feel every bit of it.



Exodus 4:10-17

What real-life elements pop out as you read the story? Which elements connected with your own experience?

Did you think God was fair? How did you expect God to react to Moses?

What do you think was Moses' reason for saving this objection to the end?

Do you think that God's solution was a good one? How do you think that solution made Moses feel?

It turns out that the hero of our story has a reason for being the quiet, contemplative type. He has a speech impediment. One of the most important figures in the Bible who was known for speaking hard truth to the most powerful people in his world didn't sound like everyone else when he spoke.

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who was known for speaking hard truth to the most
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everyone else**

In fact, it is clear that his speech impediment caused significant shame. After God proved that Moses would be equipped with some pretty incredible miracles to convince everyone around, his shame around his disability caused him to try to quit all the way up to the very end.

What kinds of things have you seen people do to those with physical differences or disabilities that shamed them?

What do you think causes or allows humans to do those sorts of things?

What could have been God's reason for choosing not to heal Moses' speech impediment?

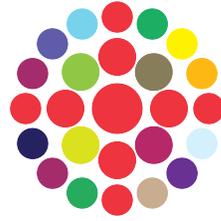
Everyone has things that are sources of shame and embarrassment. What in your life has caused you to run away from opportunities in your life?

Is there someone in your world that God might be asking you to be the Aaron in their lives? How can you be their mouth or arms or whatever part of them is weak? How can God use you to give them the confidence to follow God's call on their life?

As you end in prayer, ask God to both show you how you can walk forward despite your shame, and how you might be the Aaron in the life of someone you know. May God give you the courage to follow God's call and help others do the same.

Small Group Reflection

THE CALL OF MOSES



Before reflecting on your thoughts over the past week, take a moment to recall the main points of the Bible passages read this week.

What elements of the stories caught your attention? What pieces of the narrative had you never fully considered?

Take a moment to share a story from your own life that connects with one of the three passages we read this week. How does what you experienced help you understand Moses' story? How does Moses' story help you see your story in a different light?

What kinds of things cause us to not be fully present in our everyday lives?

When we miss out on seeing a burning bush in our life, do you think God sends another, or do we simply miss out on those opportunities? How does that change if we realize after the fact that we missed it? Do you have an example from your own life?

One of the things we discovered in Moses' story was that he hid his real problem behind other, less important excuses and questions. What causes us to hide the things that trouble us from God?

Share the story of a time when God used you to help someone overcome or compensate for their own weakness. How can your group do that together over the next several weeks?

As you close in prayer, pray that God would continue to keep you aware of God's call on your life. Pray that God would give you the presence of mind to not move on from listening after this study is over.

About the Author

Rev. Jeremy Steele



Jeremy is an ordained elder serving as the *Next Generation Minister* at Christ United Methodist Church in Mobile, AL. He wrote for the **CALLED** resources in 2015.

About Jeremy's Call

I grew up in Lynn Haven, FL attending church every time the door was open. I was in the sixth grade when I went to camp for the first time at a beautiful camp in northern Alabama called Camp Lee. It was in the main meeting lodge one afternoon that I was called into the ministry, and it has been a wild ride ever since.

I have spent the past fifteen years living into that call as a career serving in the Methodist and Episcopal denominations. I am now a Licensed Local Pastor in the United Methodist Church and serve as the Next Generation Minister at Christ UMC in Mobile, AL. There I oversee ministry to teens, young adults and young families, lead an evening worship service, and teach throughout the church.



In addition to my "day job," I spend a good bit of time writing for online and print publications, and writing curriculum for different publishers. I also travel as a speaker and ministry trainer. If you are interested in teaming up on writing, training, or speaking projects, please contact me through JeremyWords.com.