

## Case Studies of Called Lives – Week Two

This quiet-time series is used in conjunction with *The Curtain Call*, a series of lessons taught on March 9-10, 2007. Please see [www.chicagochurch.org](http://www.chicagochurch.org).

Welcome to our next seven cases of called lives in the Scriptures. We will be looking at men, women, partnerships, known and unnamed figures. For the first question in each study, there may be multiple callings in the story.

### Day Eight–Deborah

#### Read Judges 4

The deliverer, Ehud, led Israel in a powerful way, taking on great personal risk with the gruesome task of assassinating an enemy-king by himself. After *“Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the LORD.”* (**Judges 4:1**) At that moment, Deborah, a prophetess, was found in the role of Israel’s judge. It appears she was a mother figure who helped Israel return to a sense of community. (**Judges 5:7**)

At the risk of delving into the controversial issue of women’s leadership in the church, let’s note a few things. First, there were other occasions of prophetesses in Scripture. (**Exodus 15:20, 2 Kings 22:14, Isaiah 8:3, Luke 2:36, Acts 21:9**) Secondly, Deborah was in this gap role primarily because of insecure but capable men such as Barak. (**Judges 4:9**) Clearly, Deborah’s story is telltale about reluctant leaders, as much as it is about her role as a heroine in the Bible.

Deborah obviously had the gift for seeing the big picture and was able to draft up a winning military campaign against enemy commander Sisera. (**Judges 4:6-7**) She was not a glory seeker, which was evident when she set up Barak, the army commander, for a major role in attaining victory during the campaign. (**Judges 4:6-7, 14**) Though Deborah went with Barak so he would not be alone, she was nudging him to *be a man*, so to speak. Barak and his men succeeded and finally devastated Sisera’s army. And it was another woman, Jael, who killed Sisera while he was hiding. (**Judges 4:21**) Is this a story of women who were picking up the slack for men, or one of teamwork, or even something else?

Fortunately, the story is told in song in the next chapter without issues of egotism or feminism. Judges 5 contains an ode by Deborah and Barak who were celebrating their shared victory, including verses dedicated to Jael. Yet the song has a subtle message—if princes were to step up, the people will follow, and that would be Deborah’s desire. (**Judges 5:2, 9**) Under Deborah’s leadership, there were forty years of peace. When trouble arose from nearby enemies, the Lord came to the rescue again, this time with Gideon.

- 1) For Deborah, circle her call. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) Deborah was clearly a special person in many ways. What are some of her traits?
- 3) Speculate on why you think God tells this story, as this is about the only time that women played such a major role in Bible times.
- 4) What can women do in the kingdom today within the parameters of the Bible?

## Day Nine—Judas and Silas

Read Acts 15:22-35

Key phrase: *“Two men who were leaders among the brothers”*

Judas and Silas served together in an important, short-term role. Barnabas and Paul would have been headed for a heap of trouble if they didn't handle a particular circumcision controversy properly. They represented the Gentile Christians in Antioch, and the numerous converts there were offending believers from the party of the Pharisees in Judea. A huge meeting then took place, with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem presiding over the meeting to address the problem. After listening to all sides with orderly deliberation, a decision was reached and a letter was written—and the *“apostles, the elders, with the whole church decided to choose some men.”* (Acts 15:22)

Two men, Judas and Silas, were selected to deliver the letter, telling Gentiles churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia what had occurred. Even the renowned team of Paul and Barnabas could not fulfill this role alone. If so, they would have appeared to have been defending themselves by the letter that vindicated their position. Along the way, the travelers Judas and Silas *“said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.”* (Acts 15:32) Such a role was incredibly important, for even Paul and Barnabas were coming into strife over a matter involving John Mark. Truly, unity is always fragile.

- 1) For Judas and Silas, identify the calling. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) What was at stake if things went badly on their trip to Antioch?
- 3) What traits were important for Judas and Silas to have as representatives during this important juncture in history?
- 4) In times of upheaval and crisis, a church needs such individuals. Who have you seen fulfill this middle-man role?
- 5) If you were called to stand before people during a fragile matter, could you see yourself handling tension and even hostility?

## Day Ten–Ezekiel

### Read Ezekiel 2

Central Ezekiel text: Ezekiel 20

Key words/phrases: *“I am sending you to the Israelites”, “open your mouth and eat what I give you”* and *“the Spirit came into me”*

Ezekiel was among the many Jews who were captured and carried off to Babylon during the exile. He was different in that he was a prophet, and that served God’s purposes to have a prophet during the challenging days of their captivity.

In approximately the same period that Jeremiah was a prophet in Jerusalem, more than 400 miles away Ezekiel’s outpost was *“among the exiles by the Kebar River ... in the land of the Babylonians.” (Ezekiel 1:1-3)* In Jerusalem, the people were fearful and devastated. Whereas, in Babylon, the people of God were *“obstinate and stubborn”* about their situation, and the Lord found it important that they knew—*“that a prophet has been among them.” (Ezekiel 3:5)*

A cursory look through Ezekiel reveals that his task was daunting, and perhaps even somewhat futile. Most of his prophecies are negative, and he wouldn’t live to see most of the positives ones fulfilled. Why would God have him labor during this dark period of Israel’s history and not share in the happy days ahead?

- 1) Circle Ezekiel’s call. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) What is noble about the task of Ezekiel?
- 3) What characteristic distinguishes Ezekiel from being a self-serving antagonist?
- 4) For us today, how can we state unpopular positions for God and not be cynical and hopeless?

## Day Eleven– Simon Peter

### Read Luke 5:1-11

Other texts: 2 Peter 1:3-4

Key phrase: *“Left everything and followed Him”*

Simon seemed to be somewhat aloof in his original encounters with Jesus. Luke records him on his boat some distance from the shore when Jesus preached. He was within earshot of Jesus, and the rabbi-carpenter gave him some fishing direction. Simon quickly expressed his reluctance. Then, after a miraculous catch of fish, he expressed shame. Finally, he *“left everything behind and*

*followed Him.*” Simon became Simon Peter, the quintessential change-of-life-direction story found in the Gospels.

It is likely that Simon Peter’s change of status from fisherman to fisher of men brought about stressful issues for his family life. This rural, country man gave up reasonable seclusion from Rome’s grasp and eventually would die under their grip. Early church tradition reveals that he died as a martyr after standing his ground for Christ in Rome.

Near the end of his life, he wrote a letter to the Christians (in the region that now includes modern Turkey) with this opening thought—*“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these, He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”* **(2 Peter 1:3-4)** Simon Peter understood calling.

- 1) Circle any applicable calling of Peter for Luke 5:1-11. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) What stands out about Peter—that he was such an impressive person to provide leadership *or* that he was an ordinary man with a usual trade who was transformed?
- 3) What does “participate in the divine nature” mean?
- 4) What changes in *your life’s direction* resulted from following Jesus? (location, job, relationships, sins and vices, role, etc.)

## **Day Twelve – Priscilla and Aquila**

**Read Acts 18:1-3, 18-28**

Teamwork. Partnership. Camaraderie. These are important features of Christian relationships for married and single disciples, old and young alike. It is possible that Aquila and Priscilla maintained one of the most meaningful partnerships with Paul, and also served as a bridge between individual churches, much more than many other believers in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul met these self-employed Christians in Corinth. They also served in Ephesus and had Christian connections to Rome. **(Acts 18:1-2)** Three regions and important pillar churches would have a continual link through disciples such as Priscilla and Aquila, all the way up until Paul’s death. The great apostle never lost sight of how important of a role they played in his life and the life of the first-century church.

*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. (Romans 16:3-4)*

Did you know that the word *vocation*, from the Latin *vocatio*, means “calling”, not a job? It appears that Priscilla and Aquila did not just have a job, they had a calling. Making tents allowed them flexibility, the opportunity to travel and possibly even the kind of income to help advance the gospel. All disciples are of equal rank and thus should live as they are called, whether they sell real estate or coffee. Both have opportunities and limitations, just as full-time ministry work has opportunities and limitations.

The apparent ease with their role as supporters and partners enabled Priscilla and Aquila to have a meaningful and influential life, one that transcended geographical boundaries.

- 1) Circle a calling for Priscilla and Aquila as tentmakers. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
  - 2) What were Priscilla and Aquila able to accomplish through their vocation to demonstrate Christ through their trade as tentmakers?
  - 3) What role did Apollos, the man they tutored in Acts 18:24-26, have in the New Testament era?
  - 4) What unique contribution do you have in building a local partnership of the gospel as a result of your trade, skills or life experiences?
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### **Day Thirteen—The Shepherds of Ephesus**

**Read Acts 20:13-38**

Other: 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-11

None of the elders in the New Testament are even given a name unless they were already prominent as an apostle or relative of Jesus. Yet spiritual ambition is required for shepherds who end up smelling like sheep-- *“if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1)*

Being an elder/shepherd is noble because it is described as hard work with the sheep—feeding, caring, clothing, binding up and bringing back (**Ezekiel 34:1-6**), as well as behind-the-scenes protection of the flock from wolfish people. (**Acts 20:29-30**) Therefore, the elders in the large church of Ephesus were very important to Paul, partly because these brothers had a bastion to protect. Paul wanted to meet with them on a brief layover.

When he left the area, never to see them again, these unnamed men wept. Paul was cherished by each of them, and they were loved and respected by Paul. Their partnership with Paul, their devotion to the flock and their contentment to do the dirty work of caring for the sheep indicated a special kind of calling. And we still reap the benefits of their tireless work.

From the best records we have, the church in Ephesus continued to play an important role in early Christianity, having significance with both the Apostle John and other figures. The church in Ephesus is considered to be the place where Paul's letters were kept before the New Testament canon was formed. And much credit must go to these anonymous elders.

- 1) Circle the calling for the Ephesian elders. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) Most agree that churches need more men with this kind of calling. What can we each do to see this become a reality?
- 3) Which attributes expected of elders should apply to all Christians? (**See 1 Timothy 3:1-7**)
- 4) What can we do to make their role a joy?

## **Day Fourteen—Daniel and his friends**

### **Read Daniel 1**

Key phrase: *"Daniel resolved not to defile himself"*

After 597 B.C., young Daniel saw his nation and leadership humiliated and defeated, his religion had been disgraced. He and his friends were captured and brought hundreds of miles away from their home—taken from family, redressed and given a derogatory or disappointing change of name. (**Daniel 1:6-7**)

Daniel ("God is my prince") to *Beltshazzar* ("Bel is my prince")  
Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious") to *Shadrach* ("I am fearful of God")  
Mishael ("Who is He? That is God") to *Meshach* ("I am despised of God")  
Azariah ("The Lord is my help") to *Abednego* ("servant of Nebo")

The best bred of Israel were brought in initially for the king's use. (**Daniel 1:4**) The sensual and physical virtues guided the pagan king of Babylon to look for the best-fit Hebrews to employ for his service. They would have been redressed and possibly even castrated to serve as eunuchs.

Having only one God practically made these men atheists among those with so many gods. Deprogramming the monotheistic doctrines of Daniel and his friends was an early strategy after being brought to Babylon. Therefore, they were

subjected to Babylonian literature which had alternative Flood and Creation accounts. **(Daniel 1:4)** Over time, the boys were subjugated to customs contrary to their beliefs and exposed to awe-inspiring features of Babylon, one of the ancient Seven Wonders of the World.

How did the four do under such a seemingly inescapable situation? Well, they began by negotiating opportunities to display God's power from the outset. They actually asked to be tested on a vegetarian diet rather the royal and compromised food. **(Daniel 1:8-16)** God gave them success, showing them to be far better nourished than their peers. Little by little, each scenario that came up enabled Daniel and his friends to reveal their character and God's awesome features. Over the next few decades, the young men grew into manhood and became harder to replace in Babylon. God's purposes were served through their lives.

- 1) Circle the calling of Daniel and his friends. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) What is likely to have happened earlier in their youth that could have prepared these young men?
- 3) What might be a difficult parallel situation we face today?
- 4) From a situation at work, at home or in school, fill in the blanks with your name:  
\_\_\_\_\_ resolved not to \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_