

Case Studies of Called Lives – Week Three

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.

Welcome to our third weekly installment of called lives in the Scriptures. Remember that some stories involve more than one calling. By now you have already observed the vastly different kinds of circumstances that people can find themselves in under the same God. This leads to different kinds of roles and some are rare and unique. Nonetheless, they all are worthy of learning.

Day Fifteen—Prophets/Prophetesses Read Hebrews 11:33-38

... the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.
(Hebrews 11:33-38)

Most would agree that there's a difference in the role of a prophet in the Bible times than for those who are merely prophet-like. Since Christians wish to be people of courage, we can look to examples of those in the Hebrews Hall of the Faithful, even from what little we know about their lives.

Good prophets were not those who spoke and ran, but those who spoke up and stood their ground at great risk. **(1 Kings 18)** For instance, Isaiah likely died under King Manasseh's cruel reign. Jeremiah often stayed away from the reigning kings, but never too far away and never backing down. He was imprisoned and once thrown into a cistern. **(Jeremiah 36-38)** Some, like Ezekiel, experienced isolation and torment, as he labored to communicate God's vision to His people in exile.

For further study, one could attempt to match stories from the Scriptures and Jewish history to the description of **Hebrews 11:33-38**. A similar paragraph

could be written from early Christian history of tortured martyrs and valiant confessions that cost men and women their lives.

- 1) Name a prophet and circle his calling (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial).
- 2) Who was the ultimate cost of death worse for—the living or the dead?
- 3) Is it sometimes acceptable to walk away from danger? When is it not?
- 4) What was your most courageous and least courageous, even cowardly, moment?

Day Sixteen—Timothy

Read 2 Timothy 1:5-7

The following analysis of Timothy comes from Carl Sullivan, a campus disciple who has aspirations for full-time ministry. It will serve as today's reflection.

As I look at Timothy and his calling, I see that I identify with him. There are parallels with Timothy's general and primal calling to the calling in my life. The Scriptures show that Timothy was young and timid, and I relate to that. When Paul was absent, he needed Timothy to step up in his leadership and do the things that he needed to do for God. It was his turn to stand up, and with much training and many words of encouragement from Paul, he was able to fulfill his calling.

Timothy's *general calling* was seen in Acts 16:1-5, to give up everything. He left his family, was circumcised and went to follow Paul and Silas. He went with them and strengthened the faith of the churches, and they grew daily in number. He went to many places where he was needed. He went from Lystra, his home, and followed Paul on his third missionary journey. He was also called to go to different places in Asia and Macedonia, wherever he was needed. I see my self doing what Timothy did, simply doing what needs to be done for God and His church. I know that God has called me to be where I'm at right now. I have been blessed to be able to be in this mission field and to be trained by my campus minister just as Timothy was trained. My call for the moment is the same as Timothy's was when Paul left him. Paul left Timothy a couple of times in Berea (**Acts 17:14**), in Corinth (**1 Corinthians 4:17**) and in Ephesus (**1 Timothy 1:3**). He was able to stay with the churches and strengthen them in Paul's absence. For me, it would be hard to make that jump from following to leading, and that is what I feel like I'm called to do right now.

Timothy's character was perfect for meeting the needs in the church. He had the right upbringing and training to fulfill his calling. *Primal calling* is where I see Timothy's and my calling to be the most alike. In **2 Timothy 3:15**, it shows that Timothy had known the Scriptures from infancy, and in **2 Timothy 1:5-7**, he is encouraged to fan the flames and have a spirit of power, not timidity. He

had a sincere faith that was planted in him from his grandmother and mother, one that allowed him to do the things he did. In **Proverbs 22:6**, it says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” I’m sure this is one of the Scriptures Timothy knew well, and one that I have also known well. I believe that I’m at a point where I need to really fan the flames just as Timothy did. I’m getting older and I recently got married, and it is time for me to move to solid food spiritually. When I was younger and in the pre-teen and teen ministry, I heard all the time that I had great potential to do great things for God, but to my regret I just waited for God to do something with me. I didn’t take the initiative and didn’t ask, seek or knock. Even in that, I see that everything that has gone on in my life has trained me for the present time. God is waiting for me to get in line and accept my calling so that He can do His will through me. I also need the encouragement of **2 Timothy 1:7** to help me with my timidity. I may have a timid personality, but my spirit is powerful, and if God is for me, who can be against me? In **1 Timothy 4:12**, Paul encouraged Timothy in exactly the way he needed, and I need some of that same encouragement. Being young and married and in the campus ministry is awesome, but I let myself become insecure when it comes to my responsibilities. I know that I have to mature in this area and set an example for the believers. Knowing the Scriptures from infancy, growing up in God’s kingdom, learning from the tests that God has put me through, experiencing victories and failures, getting married, having a spiritually minded wife, still being in school, receiving all the spiritual training I’ve had and being blessed to have the faithful and pure heart that God has given me—all of these have been used by God to set me up to serve and love people just as Timothy did.

- 1) What similarities do you detect between Timothy and Carl?
- 2) Speculate on what Paul probably meant about Timothy fanning his gift into flames?
- 3) What is one of your prominent gifts, both from the perspective of yourself and the perspective of others?

Day Seventeen—Job

Read Job 1-2

If Job were to attend Scapegoat’s Anonymous, he could have said this:

I was a man of good reputation who suddenly lost all that meant everything to me—my family, my livestock and my health. Only my unspiritual wife survived. At first, I had my friends. Soon I became accursed by the community. When I talked to old friends they lengthened and deepened

my wounds, becoming pathological faultfinders. I found myself disoriented and in depression. *I lost it all, including my good name.*

Job began as perhaps the most esteemed figure in his community. Much later, he suffered great loss, grief and eventually sunk in the public opinion polls. Eventually, he would rise again in restoring many of his fortunes and he also received vindication. This did not happen until he had learned some valuable lessons through his ordeal, most of which involved enduring agonizing treatment:

Job's self-condemnation—9:20

Worthless help from so-called friends—13:4-5

Becoming a byword in the community—17:6

Being surrounded by physical attacks and mockers—16:10-17:2

It helped that, early on, Job realized that the Lord was behind everything (**Job 12:9, 16:9-13**). He framed his story as one of providence rather than a random and unfortunate tragedy. This was correct. If he had known about the wager that developed between Satan and the Lord (**Job 1:6-12**), then he could have framed his story in a more enlightening way. Then he would have known why he was suffering. However, then he might not have allowed the pain to properly penetrate and tutor him, as one of the benefits of suffering is the personal examination that results in soul cleansing.

- 1) What was Job's calling (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)?
- 2) How much did it help Job to see God being behind his predicament?
- 3) What do you do when you are at your lowest point, when all things seem to be going bad?
- 4) How important do you think properly framing your life story is?

Day Eighteen—Philip

Read Acts 6:1-7, 21:8-9

Other texts: Acts 21:8-9

Key phrases: "to wait on tables"

In early times, the twelve apostles, those who had been with Christ, were needed in the role of ministering His word. By now, the church was in the thousands and there were many new disciples with all kinds of questions. At the same time, there was a disturbance because of the neglect of a particular ethnic group, the Grecian widows.

In setting up leadership for this task, a high bar was set on those who would "wait on tables". It was not merely a waiting on tables. The task was an opportunity to

see who would embrace a non-glorious role with all their heart. It was also an opportunity for leadership development for larger things that would arise in the church's future. Seven men who were notably spiritual were selected by the church. In a short time, at least two of them became evangelists in the truest sense of the word. One of them, Stephen, was martyred right away. Philip joined those who left Judea after his death, but not unprepared.

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city. **(Acts 8:5-8)**

Philip quickly revealed that he had the gift of an Evangelist. The work there went very well, and after an affirming visit from the apostles, other villages of Samaria heard the gospel **(Acts 8:14, 25)**. Then Philip received 'the call' from an angel who told him to go south on a particular road. Waiting there was a wide-open official returning home to Ethiopia from Jerusalem **(Acts 8:26-39)**. The man had trouble sorting out a controversial passage in Isaiah, a text undoubtedly used by Christians to reach out to Jews in Jerusalem. God provided Philip to be in the right spot for the official, and in a short time, he was baptized. Philip went on, continuing to preach the gospel and ended up in Caesarea **(Acts 8:40)**

The last word we hear of Philip is when Paul and his followers "reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied." **(Acts 21:8-9)** He fades out from Luke's reporting after this, but not before we know that he was a deeply called person who had called offspring.

- 1) Try to identify Philip's call in Acts 6. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) Try to identify Philip's call in Acts 8. (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 3) Why was it important that Philip waited on tables before he began preaching?
- 4) Philip makes preaching seem effortless. What task can you make seem effortless?
- 5) What does knowing that he had godly offspring mean to you?

Day Nineteen—Joshua **Read Deuteronomy 31:1-3**

This reflection called "Joshua Also" on Joshua comes from campus disciple Karolynn Pohl.

“Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: ‘I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan.’ The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy the nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the Lord said.”
(Deuteronomy 31:1-3)

Joshua also, says verse three.

God involves us in these great spiritual events of cosmic-size importance (take, for example, the crossing over into the Promised Land), but it is God who moves, who does and acts and who is at the center of this great story. Moses could have said to the Israelites, “Joshua will lead you people to cross the Jordan,” and “God will be with you!” Instead, he emphasized that the Lord God Himself would cross over ahead of the Israelites. *He* would destroy the nations. *He* would take possession of the land. And in the last sentence, “Joshua also will cross over ahead of you.”

Here Joshua received a calling. But Joshua was called to be a part of something that God was doing. The emphasis was on God.

In my own life, when I lose the emphasis on God’s work and focus too much on my work (even when doing the work that fulfills my calling), my burden quickly becomes too heavy. I see all the pain, need and sorrow, and become overwhelmed. I lose hope. If I were responsible for the healing, the giving and the comforting, I might as well do nothing, for my contribution alone will be negligent. Yet I do not give up, because I know God is acting with His mighty arm all throughout the world.

I should not be confused by the fact that it is *my* calling. While it may be *my* calling, God is still the main actor. God may call me to help build a ministry at my university, but if he does, that’s exactly what He is calling me to do—help! I will listen and obey, but He will do and direct, and see to it that His will is fulfilled on this earth.

I have always wanted to do something “great” with my life—to be like the seed that fell to the ground and died and then produced 30, 60, even 100 fold what it was in the beginning. As a 23-year-old and soon-to-be college graduate, I think about exciting dreams and possibilities of the future:

- Living modestly and sending 30-40% of my income over to a church in a third-world country. (Imagine that—one person’s sacrifice being able to help an entire mission, perhaps an entire country.)
- Pursuing degrees in philosophy or science or theology and defending God in the American University through scholarly work.

- Going abroad to French West Africa to help strengthen and grow the churches that exist, and establish new churches in places like Kaolack and St. Louis of Senegal.
- Someday being the neighborhood “mom” and providing a safe place for the minds, bodies and souls of my kids, children in the neighborhood and children in the church; opening up my home to disciples and relatives and foster children for them to stay short-term/long-term.
- Ministering to Christian women in America who live in a culture that more and more is losing its understanding of gender and denying its importance and teaching about what it means to be a righteous wife, mother, sister or daughter.

There are many more crazy ideas in my head. Some of them don't seem quite compatible, like how I'm going to help the churches in French West Africa while at the same time being a mom here, or ministering to women here? How am I going to give a huge percentage of my income away and still afford to travel? How am I even going to have an income if I have all these kids, foster kids and other people staying in my home? Sometimes I worry and wonder, “What if I choose the wrong path? What if I move to the wrong city or go to the wrong university or marry the wrong person? God, what if I mess it all up!?”

This is where I need to remember that ultimately these tasks are not my own. They are things that He is doing with His hand, with His mighty arm. He may ask me to be a part of certain things and not a part of other things. But in all things, He is moving, He is leading, He is the ultimate doer.

I need not fear. At this point in my life, when it seems like all of the opportunities in the world are open to me, it is reassuring. *God* will destroy the nations. (God will destroy the sin, the hurt, the pain). *God* will take possession of the land. (God will let His name be known in every nation). Amen!

- 1) Do you remember why Joshua was privileged to go into the Promised Land?
- 2) Why it important to remember the author of the calling (as Karolynn points out)?
- 3) Like Karolynn, imagine the possible roles that you could serve in on a mission:

Day Twenty—Andrew
 Read John 1:35-42

Andrew doesn't get much of a profile among the early disciples—certainly not as much as his brother Simon. His response to Jesus was swift, strong and lasting. He had been a disciple of John the Baptist and was one of the first two disciples who initiated with Jesus Christ, asking about his rooming.

John the Baptist wasn't using figurative language about Jesus' identity, whereas Andrew told his brother, "We have found the Messiah", and brought him to Jesus. At a much later time, Peter recognized Jesus' identity and received a strong commendation by Him (**Matthew 16**), but it was Andrew who tipped him off.

The few other hints of Andrew among the Gospels fit the same pattern of a go-between. He helped bridge the gap between hungry crowds and Jesus in **John 6** and the inquisitive Greeks and Jesus in **John 12**. The Gospel of John shows that Andrew was the first of the twelve disciples, earliest to recognize Jesus, and that he continued to hold a bridging role in Jesus' ministry. As important as this was, he was not the foremost apostle nor among the inner circle with James, John and Peter.

The evidence suggests that Andrew was more relational than positional. He gave his life for Christ and endured not only the persecution ordeals in early Acts, but was an accomplished missionary. According to early legends preserved by well-known writers such as Eusebius and Jerome, he traveled to hostile Scythia, other parts of modern Russia, Asia Minor, Bithynia and many other places. So he continued to play the bridge between Jesus and sinners. In the end, tradition says that he was martyred in Patras, Greece.

- 1) What was Andrew's calling in John chapter one? (General, Missional, Primal, Crucial)
- 2) What was Andrew's primal calling, to be a _____?
- 3) What kind of ministries would such people as Andrew (a first responder, bridge-builder) be good at today?
- 4) In what area of your life would you like to be like Andrew?

Day Twenty-One—Diotrephes

Read 3 John 9-11

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is

good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. (3 John 9-11)

The Bible is filled with stories of people with selfish-ambition who successfully dupe followers and destroy communities. In the Old Testament, there are examples like Korah (**Numbers 16**), Absalom (**2 Samuel 13-14**) and the couple of Ahab and Jezebel (**1 Kings 16:31, 18-19**). In the New Testament, there is Simon the Sorcerer (**Acts 8:9-10, 18-24**), the seven sons of Sceva (**Acts 19:11-16**) and presumably Alexander and Hymenaeus (**1 Timothy 1:20**). It is Diotrophes who, while still in the church, was acting as the elder's nemesis.

The fact that there will always be such people raises questions about callings. How can we detect if we ourselves are delusional about our place in the church? How can we stop such controlling and persuasive personalities from destroying the faith of the innocent?

Diotrephes missed or forgot his original calling. This type of thing happened in the Bible times. Some of the early Christians said that the Nicolaitans (**Rev 2:6, 15**) were the followers of Nicolas from Antioch (**Acts 6:5**).

- 1) What is an indicator that Diotrephes was not serving under God's calling?
- 2) What are the apparent motives of someone who behaves in this way?
- 3) What did John conclude about Diotrephes' walk with God? (vs. 11)
- 4) What is an early detection sign that our own heart betrays us—that we yearn for recognition and position more than we do virtue?