

## **The God who calls...**

When we look at the Bible, we see plenty of stories of people being called – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, Hannah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, Mary, Peter, Paul, Priscilla... the list goes on. One of the easiest things to say about God is that God is a God who calls.

I think what is harder is then to relate that to ourselves. God is someone who calls other people, isn't he? Does he really call me? I'm going to cut straight to the point and say, yes, he does. God calls all of us. And what does he call us to? He calls us to service within his kingdom.

**Does that mean we all have to do the same thing?** No, as Paul writes, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." There are huge numbers of different ways in which God calls to into service but if you were listening carefully, you'll have spotted something else – the God who calls us is also the God who equips us with the gifts we need to do the job he's asked us to do.

I remember when God first called me to preach. I was in Uganda, I'd have been 21 and at church one Sunday at the end of the service the minister turned to me and said, "Brother Hobbs, you can give the word next week." Probably out of shock, I said, "ok" and I did and he asked me to do the same the week after and the week after. I think I was let off after 3 weeks. There was no internet to do any research, no great library to lean on, I had a Bible and one book "The Cross of Christ" by John Stott. I'm not going to say those sermons were any good but it was more that God had got me in a place where I could listen to him and the space to respond. There was nothing else in that town that would distract me and draw me away from what God wanted me to do! Back in this country I then had the privilege of a great man of God to help train the gift that God had given me. As I've said before, standing up in front of people and speaking is not me, I'd rather hide somewhere quiet. But God called and God equipped.

I also want to shoot down a little myth at this point that God only calls younger adults into service. Think of that list of names I read out at the start. Yes, there are some younger adults on that list – Hannah, Peter, Paul, Priscilla – they were all adults when God called them to his service. But Mary? A young teenage girl; David was probably about 15 when he fought Goliath; Samuel was a little boy when God first spoke to him. Conversely, Moses was in his 80's when God called; Abraham was 99 and both Joshua and Caleb would have been in their 80's when they stepped up to lead Israel after Moses died. God calls people to his service at every single age of life. As Bishop David said to me on the night I was licensed here, "With God there is no retirement". You may be called to different things, but you never retire.

**So, how are we going to think about this for us?** Within the church and God's kingdom, there are different roles and parts to play – Paul uses the illustration of the body, we're not all eyes, we're not all ears, we're each different and each part has a part of play to mutually support the other parts. Each of these parts needs someone willing to listen to the call of God and respond and God is the one who equips us to do it – either supernaturally through his spirit or through us humbly listening and learning from someone else.

**But what happens when the number of people willing to respond runs out?** Well, there are still things that need doing and so those who faithfully respond carry an extra role or two. But because their doing those other things through faithful service, the thing they are really called to do starts to suffer. We see this in Acts when the Apostles realise that they are trying to be proclaimers of God's word but end up also having to feed people – their primary call was in danger of suffering.

That's when being part of a church starts to feel like a burden. It becomes weighty and the joy starts to vanish. And so eventually they have to stop and so the burden passes to the next person...

**So why is it people don't respond to God's calling?** Is it a fear of not being able? But God is the one who equips! Moses didn't feel able, God equipped him! Peter wasn't able, God equipped him as well!

Maybe another factor is time. Do I have the time to respond? It's funny, we all have 24 hours in a day and we've all got seven days in a week. How do we find time to serve God? Not every role requires the same amount of time. Some callings need a little time. I believe there are some who are called to do 30 seconds of service. God equips them with resources and abilities to go and do a job that earns them a huge amount of money. Their 30 second calling is to give a huge amount of money to the church or Christian charities so that God's work is financed. (1 Timothy 6:17) Other roles require a lifetime of time. For each person it is about priority. **God gives us time, how do we choose to use it? Do we care enough about God's kingdom to invest the time he has given us in the role he calls us to or do the ways of this world distract us and steal our time.** As I said, the only reason I was able to listen in Uganda was because the distractions of the world weren't there.

We've said that sometimes serving God can feel like a burden but it shouldn't feel that way. It should be a joy. This is about God at work within us taking his light to the world and shining it in all the dark places.

There's some candle here and I want to give each of us a time to respond. Maybe you know the calling of God on your life at the moment and you're living it. Light the candle and pray that God strengthens you anew. Maybe you don't know God's calling but want to hear him afresh, then light a candle and ask for his lead in serving in his kingdom. Maybe you're not quite ready to respond yet. Then take a candle home with you and every day pray that God will help you to listen to him and may God give you a fresh vision of his love for you and his call upon your life.