

Hearing God's Call

DAVE BAST

Many years ago, I read a book entitled *What Does God Want, Anyway?* Well, that is a great question for all of us to ask about ourselves, and it raises a lot of other questions as well. Does God have a special plan for my life? Is there something specific he wants me to do for him, or for others? Is it possible to know that I am following God's will for my life? These questions and many others along the same lines have to do with the idea of calling or vocation. God made us who we are so that we can do what he calls us to do for him and for the world; and we can hear and discern and identify what our calling is, and we can choose to fulfill it, bringing glory to God and satisfaction to ourselves as we do. So, if any of that sounds interesting at all to you, stay tuned because that is what we are digging into on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, as you know, we are beginning a new series today on *Groundwork* that all has to do with the idea of calling or vocation, which is simply the Latin word from *voco* for call. The idea that God calls us to be something, to do something, to serve in some way; and that call can be very specific; not just general, but a particular thing that God has in mind for you, and something else maybe that God has in mind for me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's right. We had a series that we have done before on faith and work, so there is some overlap here, but in this series when God calls we want to very specifically drill into the types of calling that God does; and one of the points that we are going to want to make throughout this series is that oftentimes in the Church we kind of reserve the language of call for missionaries and pastors. They get called, you know... seminarians...when you are getting ready to become a pastor or a missionary you get asked all the time: Tell us your call story...tell us your call story...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we don't usually do that with bus drivers or teachers, but as we are going to explore, we probably should; but we are also going to explore in this series, including in this first segment of this first program in just a minute, Dave, that there are kind of layers of calls from God. Some that are general to all Christians, and then more specifically, when we start thinking about career and the functions we perform in society.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. In fact, when you were just sharing that little bit about seminarians and tell us your call story, we kind of carry that through, those of us who are ministers. When we change jobs we speak often about getting a call, and what we mean by... Ordinary people would just say: Yeah, I had a job offer from another city and

I decided to take it, or...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

No, no. With ministers it is did you receive a call?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and you get a letter of call; that is the title of the document.

DAVE BAST

So, one of the things we want to do is try to expand that idea and say everyone's job could be a calling in some sense; and to go even beyond that by saying a call has to do with more than just what your job is or your particular career. A call could be any kind of service at any time of life that promotes God's kingdom or does good to other people; and as you said just a moment ago, Scott, there is a very basic sense of call that comes to everyone in the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think one way to get at that, we will dig into a little scripture here from the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark, where we read this; and here is something that is a specific story about some people with names, but we will say in a minute that we can insert our own name here no matter who we are. So, here from the beginning of Mark's gospel.

^{1:16}As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷"Come follow me," Jesus said, "And I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹And when he had gone a little farther he saw James son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat preparing their nets. ²⁰Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with hired men, and they followed him (that is, they followed Jesus).

DAVE BAST

So, there's the basic word. I hope you caught it as Scott was reading it: He called them; and in some sense...in *that* sense he calls, I think, everyone in the world potentially: Come follow me. The most important call of God that you can respond to is to become a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We usually associate a call as something that we have to go do, but the beginning of the Gospel says before God calls us to *do* something, he calls us to *be* something, and that is a disciple. Sometimes we talk about making a decision for Christ or, you know, people talk about their conversion story when they came forward at the Billy Graham rally or whatever, but that is not a one-off decision to answer this call: Follow me. That is not a one-off decision. That becomes your daily identity. You know, in John's Gospel Jesus talks a lot about abiding: Abide in me; abide in me; I am the vine, you are the branches; you abide in me, you stay in me. That is that lifelong calling to be a disciple.

DAVE BAST

Not so long ago, my wife and I were visiting with a slightly older couple whom we were getting to know, and they said something very interesting, that they had taken I don't know how many classes at an organization entitled CALL, that is affiliated with Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and those letters stood for the Calvin Academy of Lifelong Learning. This wonderful idea of offering courses to seniors, you know, to kind of continue their pursuit of learning; but I think we could say that Jesus calls us to a lifelong discipleship, too. As you said, it is not a one-and-done kind of deal when you decide to become a Christian. It is a repeated call again and again to follow Jesus; and not only to follow Jesus, but to serve him in some way. Did you pick up on that: Follow me and I will make you fish for people, he said to the disciples.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, which will, of course...for the disciples that will mean—and it still means for us—that means going to work in God’s kingdom, doing for others what Jesus here does for these first four disciples whom he calls, making them a disciple.

So that, I think, is the first thing we want to establish in this program and in this series. We are going to talk about what we are called to do, and so forth, and how do we discern God’s call; but all of it is going to be built on the foundation of this first call of what we are called to be. First, we are called to be a disciple; all of our subsequent calls will get built on that foundation.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, here Jesus physically and visibly approached his first disciples and called to them. They could hear his voice, they could see him. Well, that doesn’t happen today to most of us. We don’t see Jesus physically; we don’t hear a voice physically. So how do we know when God is calling us? We are going to turn to that question in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are talking in this program, Dave...the first of a four-part series on when God calls. How do we know what God is calling us to do? How do we discern God’s voice? We just said in the first segment where we need to begin is the one hundred percent common call every single believer has, and that is to be a disciple. “Follow me.” That is where it begins. Jesus calls us to follow him. Sometimes we get that later in our adult lives. Some of us are raised into an awareness of that call if we are raised in a Christian home, baptized when we are children; but it is still all premised on Jesus having called us. Then, now that we are a disciple and we have a common vocation to serve God’s kingdom, then there might be other levels of calling that will get more specific about things that God wants us to do as a disciple.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is true; and for many of us it starts when we are young and we are trying to figure out our lives, you know. What kind of job do I want to do? What do I want to be in life? What do I want to study in school? In some sense, all of that can be wrapped up in the idea of vocation or calling. In fact, we sometimes speak of a vocation as a job or a career; and for Christians—for disciples—for followers of Jesus surely we would take into account that God could be involved in calling us to one particular kind of work or another; but beyond that, there are countless opportunities to serve in our communities, in our churches, our nations even; and each one of those could be a particular call from God to serve, to which we are invited to give our obedience and whole-hearted response. So, the question is, how do I know, how do I hear that? And if you ask what the Bible says about that, there are tons and tons of call stories in the Bible; and we want to look at two or three of them in the rest of this program; but sometimes it is really unmistakable. I mean, a person would literally see an angel and get a message from God in the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and other times, as we will see, it is more subtle; and the call...again, one of the things that we tend to think about in the Church is we kind of think a call is a one-time, obvious thing. There it is! It’s like getting a letter in the mail or something. Oh, I’m invited to be a plumber. But very, very often...and even in the Bible, as we will see before this program is finished...even in the Bible very often calls are discerned over a longer period of time. Sometimes other people help us to figure out what God is saying to us. Sometimes it is also a

matter of our trying something out and seeing if there is confirmation. Is the Spirit blessing what I am doing or am I getting all frustrated; and that might be God's way of saying: Listen again; this isn't the right calling. So, as you said, Dave, there is a lot of variety here, and we make a mistake if we make the idea of call a one-time, dramatic, handwriting on the wall, handwriting in the sky, angel at your bedside telling you exactly what to do kind of a phenomenon. It is much more varied than that.

DAVE BAST

Right. So, let's start with a story about listening for God's call and how to hear it when it comes. It is a fairly well-known story if you grew up in Sunday school because it is a favorite Sunday school story. It involves the child Samuel; and just a little bit of background. This story takes place...it is told in the very opening chapters of the book of I Samuel in the Old Testament. The setting is at the end of the period of the Judges, as we call it. The period between when Joshua and Moses led the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land and the establishment of the first kingdom and the first king. So, there was a period of roughly four hundred years when things were a little bit turbulent in Israel, and these different champions or judges would be raised up. In one sense, the last of those was Samuel. His mother Hannah, who was unable to have a child, went to the sanctuary at Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant was with Eli the priest, and she prayed for a baby and God heard her, and that baby was Samuel, whom she then, after raising him to a young age, returned him to serve the Lord there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which she had kind of promised she would do if God would grant her a child. So, Samuel is then brought when he is, I don't know, 5 years old maybe, just a little guy, brought to the temple and Eli basically takes over guardianship for him, raises him. Samuel is dedicated to the Lord's service; and then we get to this story, and this is one of parts of the famous Sunday school story, Dave, you referred to from I Samuel Chapter 3.

DAVE BAST

²One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the House of the Lord where the Ark of God was. ⁴Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." But Eli said, "I did not call. Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶Again the Lord called, "Samuel," and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call. Go back and lie down."

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷Now, Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The Word of the Lord had not been revealed to him. ⁸A third time the Lord called, "Samuel," and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." And then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord. For your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel, Samuel," and then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."
So, that is the story, Dave...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what is interesting here...we usually think that if God is going to call me, I mean, it is going to sound like James Earl Jones or something...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Samuel...

DAVE BAST

Yes...Samuel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, apparently it was enough like Eli's voice that he figured...you know, well, if you hear your name called in a house and it is dark, you go with the nearest logical explanation, which is your mom or dad or somebody called you from the other room; and it sounded enough like an ordinary human voice that Samuel didn't think: Well, that didn't sound like Eli at all. That sounded like God. No, apparently not.

DAVE BAST

Yes. In fact, he may have been dreaming. Maybe he thought he dreamt he heard the voice calling his name; so, he started with a naturalistic explanation: Oh, it's just Eli. He needs me. He needs me in the middle of the night for something. So again, I am struck by that same thing, that it is not a clearly supernatural experience that he is having; and he doesn't immediately identify it that way, but rather, he just kind of draws a natural conclusion; but then, too, we have this wonderful statement at the end, where Eli tells him what to do and Samuel responds the next time he hears or senses God is calling him; "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and several interesting things to draw out of this, Dave. One is that, we just said, sometimes God calls us through the ordinary. It is not the thunderous voice from the cloud; but also that may be it takes a little practice to learn how to listen for God. Obviously...it says here that the Word of the Lord had not been revealed to Samuel yet. Samuel wasn't getting regular updates from God. Who does, really; but he certainly had never had this idea that God might have something to reveal to him in a dream or in any other way, so he wasn't practiced at this; and so, maybe for us, too, it is not going to happen automatically. We all need to learn how to listen intently for God.

The other interesting thing about this story is that sometimes we need mentors to help us discern that it is God; and in this case it is Eli. Now you would think, living in the House of God as they did that Eli would have hit on this a little sooner, but the Word of God was so rare in Israel at that time that even the priest didn't think right away God had anything to say, but he did figure it out, and so he mentors Samuel and he says: You know what? Here is what I think is happening. Sometimes we all need that in our lives...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We need an Eli just to say: You know, Dave, you think you've been hearing this, and you know, it might just be. Pray about it. I'll pray with you. I'll pray about it, too. We need that.

DAVE BAST

I think the most important point is, you are never going to hear God call you if you are not really listening for it. So, to adopt that attitude of responsiveness and eagerness to hear, as Samuel did; and when we do that, we might find that God will speak to us in some very interesting ways; and that is where we will turn next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork* in a four-part series on when God calls. How do we know when God calls us? Dave, so far we have said we are all called to be disciples. Then on top of that, we get other calls and messages from God; and we just looked at the story of young Samuel as an example that it takes time sometimes to figure out it really is God calling me. It takes some

practice.

DAVE BAST

It takes a mentor sometimes to give us counsel; and we have to be listening. That is the most basic thing of all. Do you really want God to speak to you, because he will. He will call if we are listening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have all had these conversations with our spouse or a roommate or a friend. They are trying to communicate something important to us, and they will say: Are you listening to me? And we will say: Yeah, I hear you. Yes, I know you hear me; are you *listening* to me? Right; we have had these conversations, and I think it goes that way with God: Yeah, I hear you, God. Yeah, but are you listening? Do you want to hear what I have to say? Are you going to follow through on it? Sometimes again that takes some time, it takes some determination and prayer, it takes a mentor to help us discern God's call. Again, it is not always going to be handwriting on the wall. It takes time.

DAVE BAST

Well, here are a couple more call stories; also both of them from the Old Testament, that I think open up a little more of the idea of the ways in which God could call us. The first is the story of the call of the prophet Isaiah, and it is a great and powerful passage from Isaiah 6 that begins like this.

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were the seraphim, each with six wings; with two wings they covered their faces; with two they covered their feet; and with two they were flying, ³and they called one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴And at the sound of their voices the doorposts and the threshold shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. (And then Isaiah says) ⁸I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I! Send me."

So, at first glance, this story seems completely different from the call of Samuel...I mean...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. This one is a thundercloud!

DAVE BAST

A thundercloud; and Samuel is this quiet voice in the night; but interestingly, they are both in the sanctuary, and they are both there with the Ark; and the thing that jumps out about... Again, there is so much we could say about this, but just to focus on the idea of hearing the call... What Isaiah actually hears is God asking for volunteers. That is a point that Oswald Chambers made in his great devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*. When God calls us, he asks for a volunteer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes. So, sometimes there may be a specific call that says: You must do this; and here God is in the interrogative mood. He is asking a question: Let's see; I have got to send somebody; who would it be? And Isaiah says: Well, I'll go.

DAVE BAST

I'll go...

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is a call, but it kind of a left-handed call in a way because God is sort of doing it subtly through the back door, making Isaiah own it without actually having been directed per se, or by name to do it. What is interesting here, too, Dave...we should just point this out...in Samuel's call it was an unsettled time in Israel. It was the days of the Judges when everybody was doing what was right in their own eyes. The Word of the Lord was rare. In Isaiah's day it was also an unsettled time. The king had died. That is the first line: King

Uzziah had died. Always a time of national questioning when the leader dies, what is going to happen? Who is going to be next? And once again, as with Samuel, as God entered into and called a key person at a time of uncertainty, so here God gets Isaiah on track to preach to the people a message of judgment, it will turn out...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I Samuel's was too, by the way...

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We didn't read that part, but it is a message of judgment first that will then later lead to messages of comfort; but you need somebody to do it, and Isaiah says: I will do it. Even though the calling he is going to get is going to be pretty tough. He is going to be told to preach to people who won't listen.

DAVE BAST

Who won't...yes, I know it. There is so much we could say about this, again, if we had more time, but God often will call us to do something rather unpleasant that we don't particularly want to do. Samuel shrank from the call to tell Eli that there was judgment to come on his house, and especially on his sons for their wickedness, frankly. Isaiah was called to preach to an Israel who wouldn't listen anymore; and it is a risky thing, which is another common thread with the final call story we want to look at, your call to really step out and maybe put yourself in danger even. That is the story of Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho who heard God call in a sense, we believe, very different from the others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; well, she hid the spies after they had been discovered in Jericho. They would have been killed, but she said: You hide here; and then she let them down, you know, by that scarlet rope; let them escape through the city; and in Hebrews 11, we are told: By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies... She wasn't killed with those who were disobedient; and Rahab went on to have a role in Israel, and became an ancestor...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ultimately of Jesus. So here is a call...and you could read through the roll call of the saints in Hebrews 11 and see this again and again...here is a call on Rahab's life that just came through the circumstances of her life. She just did the right thing one day...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And through that God called her to a lifetime of service. So again, the main point of this program is, don't pin down the concept of a call to something big and obvious, clear as skywriting in the sky. No; it may just be through ordinary circumstances...other people...who knows.

DAVE BAST

It could be, yes. It could simply be through someone asking you to help. I mean, I have no doubt that those spies, when they realized that they were discovered, turned to Rahab and said: Help us! Hide us!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, what are we going to do?

DAVE BAST

And at that moment, this woman is confronted with a choice that is going to be momentous. Her whole life is on the line suddenly. Does she identify with Israel and the people of God and the God of Israel or does she stay in her own culture and her own place? Play it safe and turn them in? So, the call for volunteers in that sense: Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Who will hide these guys for us came through, as you said, circumstances and a simple request for help.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to continue in this series for the next three programs figuring that out. God is calling to us all the time. How do we listen; how do we discern; and we are going to think about that in the upcoming programs.

But for now, thank you for listening and digging deeply into the scripture with us here on *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope that you will join us again next time as we discover how scripture helps us discern and understand God's call on our lives. You can connect with us, too, at our website, groundworkonline.com, and tell us scripture passages and topics you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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