

Receiving God's Call

He Can't Be Put on Hold

by Ronald G. Davis

God's call has come to men and women in a variety of ways, from the direct address to Adam and Eve in the garden to the indirect call of the written Word. What ultimately matters regarding his call is our response. All must decide: run and hide as Adam and Eve tried, or pack up and follow as the seaside fishermen did.

Calling in the Twenty-first Century

One marvel of the twenty-first century is the discovery of God's secrets of creation. From magnetic digital patterns to electrons "floating" through the air, humanity has discovered and established dominion over the science God put into place at creation. Many calls now come through wireless phones and cyberspace e-mails.

As one strategy for helping learners attend to and internalize the lessons, develop a pattern of sending an e-mail or text messaging blast of a weekly truth as a preview of the following Sunday's study. Consider the following weekly messages (taken from a past study of divine calls in the Gospels):

"Simeon and Anna were called to wait. Could you do it?"

"The first disciples were called to leave successful vocations. Could you do it?"

"Matthew was called to leave a position of privilege and prosperity. Could you do it?"

"Twelve were called to fill specific servant ministries. Could you do it?"

"All disciples are called to change their central focus: from self to Christ. Can you do it?"

"James and John were called to leave behind their ideas of self-aggrandizement for submission and service. Could you do it?"

"Nicodemus was called to admit his own inadequate knowledge and understanding. Could you do it?"

"The woman at the Samaritan well was called to face and admit her sins. Could you do it?"

Telephone Calls from Heaven

Stand-up comedians have used the concept of "one-sided" telephone calls with great success. To contemporize God's call to the people in Scripture, consider developing a "script" for one or more such lessons. You may have a class member who would delight in such an opportunity. Here are two examples, the call of Abram and the call of Matthew:

"Hello, this is Abram. Who is this calling? [pause] Yahweh? [pause] You want me to go where? [pause] Oh, you'll show me when I need to know. [pause] Leave my people behind? Uh huh. [pause] Great nation? Uh huh. [pause] Great name? Oh, sure. [pause] Great blessing? But Lord, I feel blessed right here. [pause] All the families of the earth? How many is that, Lord? [pause] I wouldn't believe it? [pause] Trust you? Uh huh. Can I take anyone with me, Lord? [pause] Sarai, good! [pause] My nephew? Okay. [pause] Canaan? Where's Canaan? [pause] Oh, okay, Lord. I'll see. Uh huh" [click].

"Matthew, CTC—Certified Tax Collector—How may I help you? [pause] Well, I'm kind of busy

today, Jesus. [pause] This is my opportunity? Today? This is a pretty successful business I've got here, Lord. [pause] Well, yes, it does have its downside—hatred, resentment, and all that. [pause] Uh huh. That's true, Lord. Your kingdom is more important than Rome's. [pause] Right now, Lord? Can we discuss this over dinner? I'll invite a few friends. [pause] Follow first, feast later? [pause] Let me shut down my office and hand in my commission, Lord. See you at my house. [hangs up] What have I done?"

Such a monologue could be an effective attention-directing activity to begin a class. Be sure to have a desk phone available as a prop. And at the end of the "call," be certain to discuss how accurately or inaccurately each portrays the biblical occasion (for example, the biblical account reveals no hesitancy on the part of Matthew to follow).

Calls Against Lifetime Longings

Have your class develop an acrostic for the phrase, "Call from God." Put the letters of these words vertically down a sheet that you can post or copy and distribute. Ask the class to suggest single words that begin with each of the letters that also characterize the call of God. It will be best if no two are relatively synonymous. Here are possibilities (but note that there are possible synonymous terms included): challenging, cryptic, clear, abrupt, answerable, life-changing, liberating, frequent, far-reaching, repeated, revolutionary, open-handed, open-ended, mysterious, majestic, magnetic, gracious, gifted, oral, demanding.

When you are ready to move from text study to application, ask your class to look at their list of characteristics as a checklist for the person(s) and the call(s) being studied. Go entry to entry. For example, for a lesson on the call of Abram, if the word for C were cryptic, the question would be, "In what sense, if any, did God's call to Abram carry any sense of puzzlement?"

If the word for G was gifted, the question could be, "In what way(s) did God enable ("gift") Abram to answer his call, as the difficulties arose?" Obviously, God left many of Abram's questions initially unanswered, but he supplied the wisdom and the means to meet any challenge to his obedience. Each week it is a simple matter of replacing the name to the person under consideration.

For the visually-oriented class, you might display images to suggest something about the call of the character that highlights your study. *For Abram*, a picture of a comfortable home, to represent his call from home and family; *for David*, a newspaper front page headlining corruption in high places, to represent a call to moral integrity; *for Joseph*, a daily planner, to represent God's call to change one's immediate and long-term plans; *for Simeon and Anna*, a calendar, to represent their long wait for God's revelation; *for the first disciples*, a classified ads page for jobs wanted, to represent a call from one job to another; *for Matthew*, play money, to represent his call from a lucrative job; *for the Twelve*, a picture of mountain backpackers with heavy loads, to represent the opposite of the Twelve's accouterments; *for all disciples*, a decorative cross, to represent the ultimate call for self-sacrifice. At some point in the lesson, stop to ask whether someone can identify the relationship of the image to the study of the day.

We want every learner to know that God's call continues to this day and to every person. This is a call to the blessings of a relationship with him in his Son.