

Hearing God's Call to Great Work

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Exodus

God's call to Moses came while Moses was at work. The account of how this happened comprises six elements that form a pattern evident in the lives of other leaders and prophets in the Bible. It is therefore instructive for us to examine this call narrative and to consider its implications for us today, especially in the context of our work.

1. First, God confronted Moses and arrested his attention at the scene of the burning bush. A brush fire in the semi-desert is nothing exceptional, but Moses was intrigued by the nature of this particular one. Moses heard his name called and responded, "Here I am" (Exodus 3:4). This is a statement of availability, not location.
2. Second, the Lord introduced himself as the God of the patriarchs and communicated his intent to rescue his people from Egypt and to bring them into the land he had promised to Abraham.
3. Third, God commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh to bring God's people out of Egypt.
4. Fourth, Moses objected. Although he had just heard a powerful revelation of who was speaking to him in this moment, his immediate concern was, "Who am I?"
5. In response to this, God reassured Moses with a promise of God's own presence.

6. Finally, God spoke of a confirming sign.

These same elements:

1. Confrontation
2. Introduction
3. Commission
4. Objection
5. Reassurance
6. Confirming Sign

are present in a number of other call narratives in Scripture—for example in the callings of Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and some of Jesus’ disciples. This is not a rigid formula, for many other call narratives in Scripture follow a different pattern. But it does suggest that God’s call often comes via an extended series of encounters that guide a person in God’s way over time.

Notice that these callings are not primarily to priestly or religious work in a congregation. Gideon was a military leader; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel social critics; and Jesus a king (although not in the traditional sense). In many churches today, the term “call” is limited to religious occupations, but this is not so in Scripture, and certainly not in Exodus. Moses himself was not a priest or religious leader (those were Aaron’s and Miriam’s roles). Moses was a shepherd, statesman, and governor. The Lord’s question to Moses, “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2) repurposes Moses’

ordinary tool of sheep-keeping for uses he would never have imagined possible.

1. Have you ever had a confrontation with God?
2. How has God introduced himself to you?
3. Is your work a commission from God?
4. Have you ever raised objections?
5. How does God give you reassurance?
6. What is your confirming sign regarding your work?