

January 22 -- A Ministry is Seeking You
Acts 6:1-7 Ephesians 2:8-10

Bill has a wonderful career: he started his own business, he is a faithful witness to the work and love of God in everything he does. Bill had no thought of leaving his business to take a different position. Yet, he has been asked to consider doing just that: leave the business he enjoys, the business through which he shares God's love, and take on a completely different position in a faith-based organization. It was in talking with Bill that this idea that at times the ministry seeks the person; the person doesn't seek the ministry came to the forefront of my thinking.

In our society, we ask children what do they want to be when they grow up. We ask teens and young adults what job they are preparing to pursue. We give advice on the best jobs to apply for, the best ways to prepare resumes to set them apart from all the other resumes. We focus on finding the right job in the right location. To talk of recognizing a ministry seeking you is the flip the focus:

NOT which job—that I want—can I get

RATHER where am I being invited to do God's work

Who is doing the seeking: you? God?

Let's look at some people whose stories appear in the Bible, stories of God seeking them, of ministry waiting for them to respond with "Yes!"

Old Testament:

Abraham – God told Abraham: pack up and go where I lead

Moses – God told Moses to go to Egypt and lead God's people out of slavery

Joshua – Joshua 1:1-2 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying 'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all the people into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites.'

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Joshua, as Moses' assistant, would have been fully aware of the difficulties Moses had: the whining and complaining of the people against Moses. Joshua, along with Caleb, brought back a good report: With God's help we can move into the land God has promised. The ten others brought back bad news: the men are like giants. We can't enter safely.

Yet, Joshua said, "Yes" and prepared the people to move forward, into the land God had promised.

Abraham, Moses, Joshua: God had a ministry for each one, they didn't go out looking for something to do FOR God. But for each there was a ministry seeking him. And all three said, "Yes, I'll serve."

Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21)

Elijah, God's prophet through whom the prophets of Baal were defeated (build an altar to Baal, I'll build an altar to God; which one's sacrifice will be accepted? Pour water on the altar to God; fire came and burned up sacrifice and altar); the prophet Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, tried to kill

Elijah calls Elisha: Elisha is plowing a field; in charge of one of twelve teams of oxen drawing plows. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. Elisha ran to him to ask permission to say good-bye to his family. Elisha followed Elijah, became his servant.

Isaiah – the prophet

Isaiah 6 – Isaiah's vision 6:8 Then I 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!'"

Elisha and Isaiah: God had a ministry for each one, they didn't go out looking for something to do FOR GOD. But for each there was a ministry seeking him. And both said, "Yes, I'll serve."

New Testament:

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In Luke 5:1-11, we read how the first disciples, Simon Peter, James and John were called.

Jesus has attracted a large crowd on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In order to make himself heard, he borrows Simon Peter's fishing boat to teach the crowd on the shore. When he is finished, Jesus tells Peter to cast the nets one more time. Peter is in disbelief: "we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." But then Peter lowers the nets into the water. The nets are so full Simon Peter calls to the second boat to come help.

Seeing such a large catch of fish, Simon Peter is remorseful but also scared. "Who is this man?" With him are James and John, sons of Zebedee

Jesus says: Do not be afraid; from now on you will catch people, make you fishers of men.

Calling of Saul/Paul Acts 9:1-22

Saul was a Jew of Jews, a persecutor of believers

On the road to Damascus to find and imprison more believers, in a blinding light Jesus appears to Saul: "why are you persecuting me?" Saul is struck blind and instructed to go to Damascus where he will be told what to do. In Damascus, God appears in a vision to Ananias, asking him to find Saul and take care of him. Saul?! Ananias is alarmed: "What if I am his next target for arrest?" The Lord says, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15) So Ananias went, greeted Saul "Brother Saul" and cared for him.

Being a Christian means you cease doing what you want to do and you begin to do what God wants you to do. Both Saul and Ananias stopped doing only what they wanted to do: persecute Christians (Saul), avoid caring for the persecutor of Christians (Ananias), and chose to say "Yes" to God, to the ministry seeking them.

9:19b-20 For several days he (Saul) was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 9:21

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All who heard were amazed. Is this not the one who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name?

The number of believers was increasing, as we read in Acts 6:1-6 The Hellenists—Greek-speaking Jews—complained their widows were not receiving the same amount of food and assistance in the daily distribution.

Perhaps their complaint was real: Hebrew-speaking Jews tended to dislike Greek-speaking Jews for they usually were Jews from other countries. They were Jews who had not grown up in Jerusalem or the surrounding area ("They're not like us....")

Dissension arose; the leaders were called in to resolve the problem. Peter and others determined what should be done: 6:2 It is not right to neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables, keep accounts

6:3-4 Select seven of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this tasks, while, for our part, we will give our undivided attention to prayer and to serving the word

6:5-6 Seven men were selected, including Stephen who was to become to the first Christian martyr. These stood before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Stephen and the other six were sought out; there was ministry to do and they were the ones needed. This is the first evidence of a division of responsibilities between preaching the Good News and caring for believers. Those who were to care for others in the church, deacons, were set apart.

The first concern of the Christian church – as a body of believers – was to put Christianity into practical action (Barclay) -- Taking care of those in need

This is what we are to be and to do:

We are to believe in Jesus Christ and to believe so fervently that when Christ calls, I have a ministry for you, we say, "Yes Lord, I can serve you in that way!"

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As Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us: For we are His work, created in Christ Jesus for good works, works which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them

We are God's work, God's creation.

Psalm 100:3 NKJV

Know that the Lord, He is God. It is he who has made us and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

We are created in Christ Jesus....

We are created to be in relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are created for good works

Realizing Christ's great love for us, we feel compelled to do good

"There is something radically wrong with Christianity which does not issue in good works."
Barclay—There is something very wrong with our faith, our belief, if we are not engaged in doing good.

We have been created for ministry, to do as Jesus did

Greater works than these will you do - John 14:11-13

God already has prepared the ministry we are to do—the ministry is, exists, because God is at work in the world around us. Ministry is waiting for us to say "Yes, I'll serve."

How do we know what ministry is seeking us?

We learn to be open to the stirring of God's Holy Spirit

1) Listen to what others tell us we can do well—

Timothy-Paul commends Timothy's faith (2 Timothy 1:3-10) and encourages Timothy to "keep ablaze" the special gift of ministry Timothy has received

2) "Conscience"

--We may observe something—a person in need, a situation of need, an organization needing help...

--we have an unsettled feeling

--or our heart aches for those in such situations

--'someone should do something' we think

That someone may just be you....

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3) When presented with a ministry, we sense God's nudge to be open, we pray for guidance

And then we feel God's confidence, we have a sense that we are prepared to take this step

And our ministry is confirmed by others around us

For we are His work, created in Christ Jesus for good works, works which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them.

There is a ministry seeking you.

There is ministry seeking FBC.

What will be your response? What is our response?

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