

Date: January 31, 2010

Title: Called to Live Life

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (NLT) ⁴The LORD gave me a message. He said, ⁵"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world." ⁶"O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" ⁷"Don't say that," the LORD replied, "for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. ⁸And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and take care of you. I, the LORD, have spoken!" ⁹Then the LORD touched my mouth and said, "See, I have put my words in your mouth! ¹⁰Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. You are to uproot some and tear them down, to destroy and overthrow them. You are to build others up and plant them."

How many of you have seen the movie, "The Fellowship of the Ring?" Most of you have. For those who haven't it is based on a novel by J.R.R. Tolkien novel by the same name. The plot revolves around a particularly evil ring that has the potential to completely destroy anything that is good in this world called middle earth. In this world there are Dwarfs and Elves and the race of men or today not to be sexist we might say Homo Sapiens, and Hobbits. Hobbits are peace loving people who are short of stature and most do not like to venture out of their native land called the shire. In a previous story, the hobbit Bilbo Baggins gets possession of the evil ring. The

Fellowship of the Ring begins with an explanation of why the evil ring needs to be destroyed. Bilbo grows old and gives the ring to his nephew Frodo who takes the ring away from the shire so that the evil forces don't come looking for it in the shire.

There is one scene in the movie where a dwarf, a wizard, an elf or two, a few men, and Frodo are discussing the best way to destroy the evil ring. Each one there has an argument for why he should be the one to carry the ring to Mordor which is the only place the ring can be destroyed. The Dwarf and the Elf don't trust each other nor do the men who are assembled there and soon the discussion erupts into a big argument. While all of this is going on we see Frodo looking at the ring. It becomes obvious to him that he is the one who must carry the ring to Mordor. He is smaller than any of the others, he has virtually no experience with the world outside the shire but somehow he knows that he is the one who must carry out this difficult task. And so he says, "I will carry the ring to Mordor." This stops the argument and soon the entire group has sworn to protect the Hobbit on his impossible seeming mission.

Has anything like that ever happened to you? I don't mean that you were asked to do something that would save the world from eminent destruction. I just mean has anyone ever asked you to do something for which you felt totally unprepared? As I was preparing this message I thought of how I felt when my daughter arrived. I was 25 years old and I wondered if I was really up to the task of providing for one so helpless. I guess that with the help of God I was because as far as I know she never missed a meal and she is still speaking to me, but I still remember staring into those baby bright eyes and wondering if I would be able to care for her. That was one of those callings for which I felt totally unprepared.

I can only imagine what Jeremiah was feeling as God was asking him to speak truth to the nations. Here he was a young man – maybe as young as 13 or 14 and God told him that the time had come for Jeremiah to begin living into his purpose. God said, *"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world."* Wow, what a calling that must have been. God said I set you apart and appointed you and he was only a youngster.

So, here's a question for you: How old were you when God set you apart and appointed you? Were you 10? Were you 30? Were you 60?

Now, I expect some of you are probably saying, "Wait just a minute, Steve. I'm not sure God ever set me apart and called me." God never spoke to me from a burning bush; God never spoke to me from a pillar of fire. God never stopped me on your way out of the grocery store and said, "Hi, I'm God and I have a few things I want you to do for me." I guess that makes it a little tougher then, doesn't it. I mean if nothing like that has ever happened to you it either means that God is not interested in calling you or maybe God is calling you in a different way. I think that it is the different way we need to focus on. Let's see what Jesus had to say about our set apartness and our calling:

- *In Matthew:* Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt 28:18-20 (NLT)

- *In Mark:* And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere. Mark 16:15 (NLT)
- *In Luke:* With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: `There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.' Luke 24:47 (NLT)
- *In John:* Once more he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you."
Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep. John 21:17 (NLT)
- *Again, in John:* I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. John 14:12 (NIV)

Clearly, Jesus has it in mind that we are to be active with our faith. We are a part of the plan, so to speak. Jesus came to usher into existence the Kingdom of God and we are an important part of that "*ushering in* process. We are the ones who are called to spread the good news of Christ to the entire world; to speak truth to the nations as it were. We are the ones who are called to feed the Jesus' sheep which could mean everything from working in the soup kitchen to helping other people see the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each of us are called and each of us, like Jeremiah have been created with a purpose. Psalm 139 says, **Psalms 139:15-16 (NLT)** "You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. ¹⁶You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” God has a purpose in mind for each of us.

For some, that purpose is large, obvious and easily recognizable. For others they find their purpose in the day to day tasks that come their way. Some will ask, “When is God ever going to show me my purpose?” For others, the calling and the purpose are obvious.

But here’s the thing: Whether you are called to some grand easily identifiable purpose or to some seemingly mundane task it is still the calling of God and every day we are given the opportunity to rise to the level of our calling.

Some days we will sparkle at it. Some days we will slip into our calling like a hand fitting into a well fitted glove. We are moving smoothly through the motions and everything is fine. But then there are other days when our calling may be as simple as making coffee and getting kids to school and all we want to do is lay in bed and watch soap operas. Some days we are called to work with a coworker who constantly rubs us the wrong way. Some days we are called to forgive a family member who says some really mean and hurtful things. These small things may not seem like God’s calling, but in fact these small things are a crucial part of the calling from God.

An example of this in my life was saying yes to fatherhood turned out to be a pretty sizable calling in my life. But a part of that calling was saying yes to the little decisions that came with being a father... like getting to work on time so that I could keep my job and support my family... like playing with my daughter even when what I really wanted to do was just sit and read a

book... like walking her to the bus when it would have been easier to let her walk herself.

One way we can look at this is like our calling is like a pyramid. We have one major calling that is moving us forward. Let's say this is a decision to give our lives to Christ. This is the top of the pyramid. And then just below this there are other callings that may not seem quite as important as the one at the top of the pyramid, but still important. This might be a decision to marry a good Christian man or woman or to be a Godly father or mother. Then there are third level callings like making sure the kids get a good education. The third level supports the second and the fourth supports the third and so on. And soon, maybe without even knowing it, we are living an abundant life of purpose as we are called by God, faithful in the seemingly small callings from God that support the larger callings from God.

(Matthew 25:14-29) Jesus told the story of a man who was going away on a long trip but before he left he gathered 3 servants together to care for some of his money while he was gone. He gave 5 bags of gold to one, 2 bags of gold to the second and to the third he gave only one. The first servant immediately took the gold and began investing it and using it and eventually he doubled what the master gave to him. The second did the same thing doubling what the master gave him. The third took the master's gold and buried it. When the master returned he was pleased with the work of the first two servants and gave them even more responsibility. The master was angry with the third servant because he did absolutely nothing with what the master gave to him. Listen to how Jesus concluded this story:

To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are

unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away. Matthew 25:29 (NLT)

Now, I would like to suggest that when Jesus said *they will have abundance* he wasn't talking about gold or treasure. I'm pretty sure Jesus was talking about life itself – abundant **life**. I don't believe that we just stumble into an abundant life, we are called into it. We are called into life that is full of joy and peace and love and caring... all the things that make life worth living. And even the smallest decisions we make can be the answer to God's call... decisions about:

- how we are going to respond to our child when we would really rather read the paper. (Or I guess these days that would be get on the computer.)
- Or decisions about how we are going to relate to our boss and coworkers.
- Or decisions about how we are going to act with the person that just rubs us the wrong way every time we are around them.
- Even the decisions we make about how to spend the few hours we may have in the day when we are not working can be an answer or a rejection of God's call.

And what I have noticed is that these 3rd, 4th, and 5th level decisions to follow God's call can be just as difficult as the 1st and 2nd level decisions are. Many times these are some of the hardest ones to make. Their hard to make because it seems like they don't amount to much, but they do. These decisions that build the foundation of our pyramid need to be as solid and clear in our minds as the ones that are at the top. If we reject God's call in these seemingly small things, we develop holes

in our foundation and the pyramid gets shaky; sometimes – often times holes in our foundation means that our life gets shaky.

God asked Jeremiah to do something that he at the time thought was impossible. But God said, “don't be afraid, for I will be with you and take care of you.” Even in those little decisions we are called to make, we can rest assured that God will be with us. For most of us, God will not be speaking directly to us and touching our mouths with divine fingers, but whether it's one of those little calls or a great big one, God will be with us. God is calling us to live life... the grand moments and the not so grand alike. It's a calling we accept or reject every moment of every day. So, let me leave you with this question... Are you accepting yours? Amen.