



“I’m Getting a Call... But What If I Don’t Want to Answer?”

Hesitations and Resistance to Call

Focus: God has placed a call on our lives—and sometimes it takes us by surprise and upends our entire lives! Abram and Sarai had lived in Ur for decades, and packing up their entire lives to become desert nomads was probably not on their bucket list for retirement. Similarly, we sometimes find ourselves gently nudged (or rudely yanked) out of our comfort zones when we become aware of God’s call on our lives.

General Comments:

- This sermon will—depending on the direction you and the Holy Spirit choose to take it—invite your congregation to ponder:
 - What it means to discern God’s calling when you feel like you’ve already got your life all figured out.
 - The ways that God’s call can nudge—or yank!—you out of your comfort zone.
 - If your congregation is largely comprised of older adults, you might invite them to consider whether there is an “age limit” on God’s calling. (Spoiler alert: there isn’t!)
- As you prepare for this week’s sermon, continue to take time to touch base with anyone who might have expressed interest in the notion of call, or anyone who may be responding to an invitation to discipleship. Those ongoing conversations might shape your thoughts around this series in unexpected ways as you move forward!
- As with prior weeks, consider prayer walking through the sanctuary/worship space during the week or before the service. As you move through the sanctuary, ask God to speak to the people who will be in that space. Pay attention to any Holy Spirit “nudges” as you dedicate and pray for the space.
- Consider including the teaching points from the Proclamation section in the bulletin for further reflection.

Scripture Selection:

- Genesis 12:1-9—The Call of Abram and Sarai

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I

will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot and all the possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Outline:

The following sermon has been structured to have the flow of an **AGAPE** sermon. For more on this, check out the model in the book [*That’ll Preach: 5 Simple Steps to Your Best Sermon Ever*](#) by Charley Reeb. The five steps are: (AGAPE) Anticipation—Gospel—Answer—Proclamation—Explosion. An outline is provided that includes research and preaching “helps.” However, it is heavily dependent upon the preacher bringing their own experience to the sermon.

- **Anticipation (Introduction/Hook)**
 - Think about a time when God’s call disrupted your carefully-laid plans. If you can’t think of anything from your personal experience, consider the following:
 - Stories from colleagues who entered ministry later in life
 - Stories from family members who encountered unexpected changes in life (a surprise pregnancy, an unexpected move, a sudden call to adopt, a midlife career change, etc.)
 - Stories about institutions—like churches!—that experienced an unexpected shift in calling/purpose.
 - “Hook” your listeners with a question about the often-disruptive nature of God’s call to discipleship, such as:
 - **What if I think I’m too old to be called?**
 - **What if my sense of call conflicts with my existing plans?**
 - **Does God really expect me to do something new at this stage of my life?**

- **Gospel (Scripture)**
 - Spend some time reading and contemplating Genesis 12:1-9. Consider the following questions:
 - What do you notice about this text? Are there words or phrases that grab your attention?
 - Put yourself in Abram’s shoes—what would you be feeling in this situation? (Surprised? Scared? Uncertain?) Imagine his internal dialogue during this experience. Then, do the same for Sarai...keeping in mind that she only hears about this calling secondhand. What would it be like to have your spouse of 50+ years come home and invite you to completely upend your life?
 - What does this text tell us about hearing the voice of God? What does it tell us about responding to the voice of God?
 - Consider reading further into Abraham and Sarah’s story, including the covenant (Genesis 12) and the three visitors (Genesis 18.) Think about what it would be like to answer a call and then wait two decades before it finally begins to come to fruition. How do you think this couple approached their call before Isaac’s birth? And how would they have looked back on it *after* Isaac was born?
 - Below are a couple of commentaries that may be helpful in guiding your unpacking of the Scripture:
 - From the [Center for Excellence in Preaching](#), by Rev. Scott Hoezee
 - From [Working Preacher](#), by Rev. Dr. Carolyn B. Helsel
 - If you’re preaching to a congregation of seniors, you might appreciate [this article](#) on the callings of older adulthood, by Rev. Dr. Scott Hughes.
- **Answer**
 - Go back to the question you used in your “hook”. What wisdom can you glean from this Scripture as you attempt to answer this question?
- **Proclamation**
 - What is the “big takeaway” that you want to communicate to your hearers?
 - Consider incorporating the following points (you could share these in your bulletin, on your Facebook page, or other avenues as well):
 - God’s call can *upend our carefully-laid plans!*
 - The Good News is that when God calls us out of our comfort zones, *God always goes before us!* God always prepares the way.
 - There’s *no such thing* as being “too old”, “too settled”, or “too stuck in your ways” to answer the call!

- **Explosion (Closing)**
 - You've asked a question, you've turned to Scripture for an answer, and you've proclaimed the Good News—so now what? What are you inviting your congregation to *do* with the story of Abram and Sarai's call? This will be for you and the Holy Spirit to discern; below are just a few directions you might explore.
 - Invite your listeners to think about a time in their lives when God surprised them and changed their plans. What would they say to their younger selves now that they're on the other side of that upheaval? Encourage them to write a letter to their past self and reflect on the good that God has done.
 - Invite your listeners think of three *new* ways that they can serve God at whatever age they currently are—two that would be relatively easy, and one that would be more challenging. Invite them to write them down, pray on them, and discuss them with a trusted friend or mentor.
 - Depending on your setting, you might consider transitioning from your message into an interactive prayer response. One example might be to distribute small pieces of dissolving paper (easily found on Amazon) to your congregation (leave on their seats or tuck in a hymnal). Instruct them to write their fears and hesitations about saying “yes” to God's call—something like “too old” or “too settled” or “doesn't fit with my plans.” Then invite them to come forward and place it in a bowl of water and prayerfully stir the waters until the paper disappears. (Provide a chopstick or pencil to be a “stir stick”, as the water will become murky with the dissolved paper.)
 - Continue to extend the threefold invitation from last week: **Pray. Seek. Go.**
 - **Pray:** Invite your people to ask God to help them see, hear, or know what God's voice sounds like. Encourage them to use whatever words they might have for prayer. “God, will you help me to hear your voice?”
 - **Seek:** Pay attention to possibilities that open up or scripture that reveals what God might be saying to you. “I am paying attention to God's words for me by...”
 - **Go:** Reach out to a pastor, mentor, or trusted friend to consider what God may be calling you to do. “I think God might be...”