

No.

Date

I think
I'm called.

What do
I do now?

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WITH A PREFACE BY

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CHAPTER 1

FROM DREAMING TO BELIEVING

Can God Really Use Me?

What is hindering you from becoming what God wants you to be? You'll be amazed at the responses people give to that question. The following is not an all-inclusive list, but some of the responses sound like this: *You don't know my past and what I've done. My parents aren't ministers, so how can I be one? I'm too poor to launch out in ministry. My cultural background makes me a minority in my area—a big disadvantage. I never went past high school. I've always been told certain ministry positions are just for men, and I'm a woman. You've never seen a bumbler like me. Believe me, you don't want to get me behind a pulpit.*

This reminds me of Moses' response when God called him (Exodus 3-4). After 430 torturous years of Israel's servitude to Egypt, God chose Moses as the right man for the job of wresting His people from Pharaoh's cruel grip. Moses was one of the fortunate few in that God revealed the specifics of his mission at the time of his calling. Unfortunately, the specifics scared Moses, and he needed convincing. So

God gave him a demonstration. He told Moses to throw down his staff, and it turned into a snake. When Moses picked it back up, the snake reverted to a staff. Then God directed Moses to put his hand in his shirt, and when he pulled it out, he was horrified to see it was white with leprosy. “Now put your hand back in your shirt,” said God. Moses obeyed, and when he brought it back out, it was as normal as his other hand. I mention this object lesson to point out that God sometimes works really hard to get people to buy in to His calling.

Identification comes before development

This first chapter of this book could very well determine whether or not you ever *identify* your call. Identification comes before development. If you can't dream about what God is capable of, and then believe He could use you to accomplish it, then this is the first thing you need to bring before the Lord. Ask Him to let you see yourself through His eyes and not your own. Too many people who are called by God either ignore the call, question it, reason it away, or just walk away from it altogether. To understand why, refer back to the excuses mentioned above.

The first chapter of this book could determine whether or not you ever identify your call.

It's obvious Moses tried to walk away from his calling. He came up with a list of excuses why he wasn't fit to be what God was calling him to be or do what God was calling him to do. First, he asked, "Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11), like he was way too low on the totem pole to be of any use. Then he said, "I don't even know Your name. Who shall I say sent me?" (3:13). Then he asked, "What if they won't believe me and deny that God ever appeared to me?" (4:1). He pointed to his woeful lack of oratory skill. "I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled" (4:10, NLT). He finished with, "Lord, send anybody else but me!" (4:13).

Stop and think about Moses' excuses and you'll see they're a lot like our excuses today: *I'm no one special. I don't have any authority. What if people won't accept what I'm saying? What if they won't believe You sent me? When they hear me stuttering, they'll laugh me out of the pulpit. I'm neither gifted nor capable of doing what You ask, so please find someone else who can do a better job.*

Getting from Point A to Point B takes time

When God calls someone, He will make that calling clear—but in His own time, not yours. Sure, once Moses was convinced the mission was possible, you could say he marched right back to Egypt and stepped into what God was

calling him to do. However, it's important to remember that deliverance from Egypt took a while, maybe eight to twelve months of plagues to break through Pharaoh's flinty hatred. But getting the people out of Egypt was just the *first* part of his calling. He couldn't take them to Mount Sinai and then abandon them in the hostile wilderness. No, from the beginning, God's ultimate goal was for Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (Exodus 3:8). When God calls you, the first step in the journey is never the end of the calling.

There are many biblical examples of this. Abraham left his father's house when he was seventy-five (Genesis 12:1-4), but the promised son didn't arrive until twenty-five years later. Joseph had God-given dreams, but he sank into a vortex of betrayal and disappointment for more than twenty years before those dreams came to fruition. We're not sure exactly how old David was when Samuel anointed him to be king, but we do know he was quite young. He suffered through fifteen to twenty-two years of running like a fugitive before he ascended to his rightful throne. But Abraham, Joseph, and David spent those years learning, growing, and developing leadership skills. They didn't just sit around waiting for God to get moving. They removed from their place and went after it.

God calls people of all ages, but the time of calling is never the time of fruition. The initial calling is like a roadside arrow pointing the way to your destination. But between you and the destination is the journey of preparation. Don't be daunted or discouraged because the road

is long and winding. You can trust the process, because you can trust the *God* of the process.

The easiest thing in this world to find is someone who will tell you that you can't do or be something. David's brothers refused to see him as a king. They mocked him as the runt of the family and disparaged his ability to stand up to the giant. Joseph's brothers—and even his parents—didn't believe he would rule over them, as his dreams implied. His brothers hated him for daring to elevate himself. Sometimes when you're called by God, the greatest hurt you'll face is when the people closest to you don't believe in your calling. They disparage you for living in la-la land. However, if God gave you that dream and He is the One who called you, then hold on to every one of those dreams. Remove from your place and go after them.

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Dreaming is a sign of hope

Dreaming is a sign of hope, a sign that you think you can do it. Dreaming will drive you to get up in the morning, work hard, and maintain discipline. People who don't dream don't accomplish anything. And they're not happy being miserable nondreamers by themselves; they want the dreamers to be miserable too. They're the ones trying to keep the dreamers

from ever accomplishing anything. I'd rather be a dreamer!

Jacob dreamed about a ladder stretching from Earth to Heaven (Genesis 28). When he awoke, he built a monument to the Lord. Over the next twenty years God changed his character and even his name. In his dream, newly crowned King Solomon asked God for wisdom (I Kings 3:5), and God not only gave him wisdom, but also riches and international influence. In Matthew 1:20, Joseph's dream confirmed that the baby that was conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit and was indeed the coming Messiah. He spent the rest of his life guarding and raising that precious child into manhood. Peter had a vision of a bulging sheet full of unclean animals and creepy-crawlies being let down. God told him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (Acts 10:13).

"Not so, Lord," Peter answered, "I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." When Peter finally understood what the dream meant, he went on to ignite a worldwide revival among the Gentiles. Never stop dreaming!

Don't allow your past to dictate your future

Some of you will fight feelings of inadequacy and insignificance because of what you've done in the past. But the apostle Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark

for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

We have to make a conscious decision to forget the debris and havoc that once littered our past and press on to the high calling God has laid on our hearts. Paul understood this better than most. He obviously struggled with the fact that he had hated Christians. He had consented to the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:57-8:1), then proceeded to go from door to door in Jerusalem, ferreting out all who believed Jesus was Messiah. He dragged off men and women to face trial and imprisonment (Acts 8:3). When he learned prisoners were communicating with their Christian friends in Damascus, he obtained arrest warrants and rushed off to bring these people as prisoners back to Jerusalem for punishment (Acts 22:4-5). On that fateful journey God changed his life (Acts 22:6-11). God clearly stated He wasn't reaching to Saul (eventually called "Paul") just to save his own soul. Instead, God said, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). God had a unique and distinct plan for Paul's life, and He does for yours too.

Paul knew the importance of forgetting past things to press toward a high calling. He wrote to the Corinthian church about a list of sinful things that would have kept people out of Heaven if not forgiven and forgotten. But he ended the passage with hope: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God"

(I Corinthians 6:11). Paul fully understood how God could take lives filled with terrible sin, turn them around, and give them a gentle push toward the high calling of being the chosen vessel He knew that person could be. If you want to be the chosen vessel God has ordained you to be, then you can't allow your past to dictate your future.

Peter struggled to forget the past

God is not limited by what people have done in the past; He just wants to know if they will let Him lead them into their future. We see this especially in the life of the apostle Peter. He knew in theory all the right moves to make and what to say, but he was always acting and speaking without fully thinking the matter through. Peter was a strong man and a born leader. Leaders must take risks at times, and Peter was always up for the challenge. How many people do you know who'd be willing to jump out of a boat in the middle of a storm at sea and see if they could walk on water?

Peter always had a ready answer to tough questions while everyone else stood frozen, afraid to answer. He didn't give a second thought to looking foolish if he got it wrong. When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Peter, burning with certainty, blurted, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" He was the first to receive the revelation of God manifest in flesh. (See Matthew 16:13-19.) Jesus exclaimed, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my

father in heaven has revealed this to you . . . Now I say to you that you are Peter [*Pétros*, a stone], and upon this rock [*pétra*, a projecting rock or cliff, referring to Jesus Christ] I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 16:17–19, NLT).

What glory! What excitement! But the bubble burst all too quickly. From that time forward, Jesus began telling His disciples plainly that He would have to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the chief priests and scribes, and afterward be killed and rise again the third day. Peter, emboldened by the “keys” jingling in his pocket, called Jesus aside. “Oh no, Lord! Heaven forbid! This will never happen to You!” Then the tide turned so swiftly it made Peter’s head spin. Jesus thundered at him, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not God’s” (Matthew 16:23, NLT). What a let-down! But that was Peter’s life story.

Peter ended up failing Jesus miserably. On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus once again referred to His impending capture and death. He said, “Tonight, all of you will desert me.”

Peter blurted, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you!”

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

“No,” Peter insisted. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” All the other disciples vowed the same. (See Matthew 26:31–35.)

Sure enough, while Jesus was enduring the mock trial, Peter was out in the chilly courtyard warming his hands at the fire. A young maiden remarked, “You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean.” Peter denied it, but the maiden said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

Peter barked, “I don’t even know the man!”

A little later one of the bystanders came over to Peter. “You must be one of them. We can tell by your Galilean accent.”

Peter shouted, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know the man!” And immediately the rooster crowed. Remembering Jesus’ words, Peter went out and wept bitterly. (See Matthew 26:69-75.) Imagine the thoughts running through Peter’s mind as he stood there shuddering with great sobs, his eyes spouting a fountain of tears. Three and one-half years of following Jesus—blown to bits in the space of a half hour. How could he have denied knowing the Master he’d claimed to love and revere the most in the world? Have you felt called by God at one point, but subsequently failed Him? Have you made a mistake and wept bitterly about it because you thought your relationship with Jesus was broken beyond repair? No doubt Peter was weeping not only because He let Jesus down, but he also was mourning the bright future he could have had.

After Peter denied Jesus, where did he go? He said, “I’m going fishing.” Failure lured Peter back to his old way of life. Failure made him feel his calling was no longer valid. There no longer was a future. From the boat, he and the other

disciples saw a figure of a man standing on the beach, shrouded in the morning mist. The man's voice echoed across the water, "Fellows, have you caught any fish?"

"No!" they shouted.

"Throw out the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you'll get some." They did, and the net was so full they couldn't haul it in.

John said to Peter, "It's the Lord!"

Impulsive as ever, Peter dove into the water and swam with all his might. Jesus had prepared fish and bread over an open fire. After breakfast, Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, do you love me more than these?" Peter glanced at the pile of fish. "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

"Then feed my lambs." Jesus asked the same question twice more, and when Peter confirmed his love for the Master, Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus reached out to Peter in his state of failure, confirming his calling. Peter could have said: "But, Lord, I can't feed your sheep. I'm not the man for that job. I'm a failure when it comes to serving You! How can I lead anyone else?" But Peter didn't say any of that; he simply accepted God's grace and began pressing toward the future.

As you start reading this book, it's no secret that you've failed at times. Like everyone else, your past is checkered. You've made some big mistakes and really let God down. Before you can identify and develop your call, you need to accept the grace of God extended toward you. He still wants to use you. He has a plan for your life and if you will repent, the calling He gave

you is still intact. Do you love Him? Then step into your calling.

What did Peter's future hold? To begin with, three thousand souls were waiting in Jerusalem for him to get the sound of that rooster crow out of his head. The Temple was waiting for Peter to preach and teach in. Households all across Jerusalem were waiting to welcome him for fellowship and teaching. Not only that, a centurion in Caesarea was waiting with all of his household for Peter to come and use the keys to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles. What would have happened if Peter had stopped dreaming and believing for his future because he just couldn't get over his past? How many people are waiting on you to get over your past so they can be impacted by your life and ministry?

If God has called you to be a chosen vessel for His kingdom, don't let your past mistakes and bad choices keep you from what He is calling you to be. Don't let a lack of family support or critical bystanders tell you that you'll never amount to anything. God placed the dream in Joseph to save the world from famine. He spoke to Moses from a burning bush because He saw great potential in that rugged shepherd on the backside of the desert. He changed Paul's life on the Damascus road because He knew Paul possessed the energy and drive to turn the world upside down.

Trusting God is not the crisis of faith. The struggle comes when you try to believe that God wants to do a work through *you*. I say if God is going to use someone, it might as well be you!

Come up with all the excuses you want—we all have them—but God called *you* for a purpose. He has a specific plan. He is waiting for you to trust His grace enough to know that He can use you to accomplish great things.

Discussion Questions

- Why do many people struggle to believe in themselves?
- What lies about your past have you believed that need to be forgotten and left behind in order to move forward?
- Why is it so important to dream?
- What is one of the dreams God has given you that you have not yet seen come to fruition?