

LIVE AS MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD

I Samuel 3: 13-18

Mount Vernon Nazarene University

May 1997 Baccalaureate Address

Several years ago I heard this statement: "Every man's life can be summarized by one sentence." Parallel to this thought is the idea that every person will be remembered by one thing.

I think this is true of teachers. Who was your most significant teacher at MVNC? Why do you remember him/her?

The same principle is true for pastors. Name the pastor who has impacted you the most? Why do you remember him/her? The love and contributions of teachers, and pastors, more likely than not, will be remembered and summarized by one sentence.

The same can be said for your college president. I strive to be an efficient administrator. I desire to be an effective fund-raiser. But I am passionate on wanting to be known as a man of God.

This evening I ask you to join me in desiring that the words of I Kings 17:24 will be spoken of each of us: "I perceived that he was a man of God. "Will you affirm that...

Whatever accomplishments you may have enjoyed at MVNC,

Whatever honors or recognition may have been extended to you,

That first and foremost you want to be known in life as a man or woman of God.

Two questions emerge for both you and me if we really want to be known as godly men and women.

Question #1: What does it really mean to be a man or woman after God's own heart?

Last Sunday afternoon, I had the profound privilege to deliver the Commencement address at Nazarene Theological Seminary. As an alumnus of NTS, it was a highlight of my life to speak to the graduating class of 1997.

In the audience was Dr. J. Kenneth Grider, highly esteemed professor emeritus of Nazarene Theological Seminary. He was one of my theology professors. He was present for the Commencement activities because the seminary was honoring the NTS class of 1947. Dr. Grider graduated from NTS fifty years ago.

When I heard he would be present, I included in my address a prayer of Dr. Grider from one of his books, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. The prayer captures, in part, the essence of what it means to be a godly person.

Father, I am Your bread. Break me up and pass me around to the poor and needy of this world.

I am Your towel. Dampen me with tears and with me wash the feet of people who are weary with walking and with working.

I am Your light. Take me out to where the darkness is thick, there to shine and let Christ shine.

I am Your pen. Write with me whatever word You wish, and placard the word where the least and the lost of the world will see it and read it and be helped by it.

I am Your salt. Sprinkle me on all the things that You want for people, so that my faith and love and hope will flavor their experiences.

I am Your water. Pour me into people who thirst for You but do not even know that it is You for whom they thirst. Pour into them the trust that You have helped me to place in You. Pour into them the inward witness that is in me. Pour into them the promise that soon the summer drought will pass and refreshing rivers of water will gush down over them.

I am Yours, Lord God. Use me up in what You will, when You will, where You will, for whom You will, even if it means that I am given responsibilities that are considerable and costly. Amen!

Whatever else it means to be a man or woman of God, it includes the spirit and content of this prayer.

If question #1 asks the question, "What does it mean to be a man or woman of God?", then another question appropriately follows.

Question #2: How do we become men and women of God?

A study of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, and Samuel -- spiritual giants in the Old Testament -- gives us four insights into how we can become men or women of God.

Insight #1 -- Listen...and do not ignore.

To **Abram**, in Genesis 12:1, God said, "*Leave your native land, your relatives, your father's home, and go to a country that I am going to show you.*"

And to **Moses**, in Exodus 3:10, He stated, "*I am sending you to the King of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country.*"

God instructed **Gideon** in Judges 6:1-14, "*Go with all your great strength and rescue Israel from the Midianites.*"

And God said to **Samuel** in I Samuel 3:13, "*Tell Eli that I am going to do something terrible to the people of Israel that is so terrible that everyone who hears about it will be stunned.*"

I doubt that any of these men fully understood the implications of God's call to them: Perhaps it would have overwhelmed them more than it did. God said: Go... "to a new country." "Lead my people." "Rescue Israel from Egypt." "Tell Eli that destruction will come to his house."

Your call and my call may not be as dramatic as the call to these men. But this significant insight remains: Seek first to **listen** and hear God...**not to fully understand the implications of His call.**

Insight #2 -- Respond...and do not hesitate. Look again at these four men.

Abram started immediately for the new country Canaan. However, a famine came so they decided to go farther south to Egypt. (Genesis 12:1) When he was about to cross into Egypt, he said to his wife Sarah in Genesis 12:13, "*when they see you they will kill me and let you live. Tell them that you are my sister: then because of you they will let me live and treat me well.*"

Moses hesitated and his hesitation took the form of excuses: In Exodus 3:11, he said, "*I am nobody. How can I go to the King and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*" Several verses later, he asks (3:13 NIV) "*Suppose they ask me 'who are you?' What am I to say?*"

He continues (4:1), "*Suppose the Israelites do not believe me and will not listen to what I say. What shall I do if they say that you did not appear to me?*" Moses complained (4:10), "*No Lord, don't send me. I have never been a good speaker, and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me. I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant.*" Finally, he said, "*No, Lord, please send someone else.*"

Gideon hesitated. The Lord's angel appeared to him in Judges 3:12, and said, "*The Lord is with you, brave and strong man.*" But Gideon replied (v. 13), "*If I may ask sir, why has all of this happened to us if the Lord is with us?*" Several verses later (v. 15), he questioned, "*But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the tribe...and I am the least important member of my family.*" And he requests (v. 17), "*Give me a sign that you are really the Lord.*"

And Samuel also hesitated, as reflected in I Samuel 3:15. He "*stayed in bed until morning: then he got up and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision.*"

Again, our hesitation, our questions, our fears will perhaps be different. Yet I hear:

Will I make enough money?

It has too many problems.

What if they don't like me? (or my wife?) or the fact that I'm single (and satisfied)?

What will my friends say?

What if they don't like my work, appearance, my lifestyle, my teaching...

What if it's not what I want?

What if it's less than I thought it would be?

What if, what if . . .

Remember insights #1 and #2 on how we become men and women of God: **#1 – Listen...and do not ignore; #2 – Respond...and do not hesitate.**

Insight #3 -- Receive...and do not reject. Back to these men.

To Abram, after he was thrown out of Egypt (Gen. 13:14-17), God said, "*I am going to give you and your descendants all the land that you see...and it will be yours forever.*"

To Moses (in Exodus 3:12). God answered Moses' first question with these words, "*I will be with you and when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain. That will be the proof that I have sent you.*" To another question, (3:14), God said, "I am who I am. Tell them: 'the One who is, I Am, has sent you.'"

And to another objection (4:5), God gave Moses miraculous power with a stick and said to Moses, "*Do this and prove to the Israelites that the Lord has appeared to you.*" God did become angry at Moses (see 4:14), but even then, did not reject him. The rest of the book of Exodus records God's patience with Moses.

Look at God's provision **to Gideon**. God said (Judges 6:14), "*Go with all your strength for I myself am sending you.*" And (6:6), "*...you can do it because I will help you.*" And later (6:17), God said, "*I will stay until you come back.*"

Sounds familiar. God provides mercy and patience to all of us, even when we express hesitation and fear.

Thank you, God, *for not giving up on us* when we expressed so little faith.

Forgive us, God, when our responses seem *at times no different from responses of unbelievers.*

Father, enable us to receive your grace *joyfully.*

Remember insight #3: **God's answer to our hesitation is mercy and grace, not rejection.**

Fourth Insight -- Affirm God's call and word to us, and do not deny it.

Look again at **Eli's response to Samuel** after he had told Eli everything and kept nothing from him. Remember the words of our scriptural lesson? "*He is the Lord: He will do whatever seems best to Him!!*" What an affirmation! Yes, Lord! I will, not because I fully understand, but because you are the Lord, and you will do in my life what is best.

How much energy (physical, emotional, and spiritual) is expended in worrying about the *how* and the *why* of God's call to us?

How can/will it work out?

Why would God call me to do this?

What will be the result?

What is needed is a strong affirmation of His presence and leadership in our lives and an accepting of the truth that He knows best and will reveal the details to us in His time.

In His time, in His time, [so the chorus goes]

He makes all things beautiful in His time.

Lord, please show me every day, as

you're teaching me your way,

That you do just what you say, in Your time.

Samuel provides the key by which we can affirm God's word (I Samuel 3:10).

Listen again to **Samuel**, "*The Lord came and stood there, and called ...*

'Samuel, Samuel.'" Samuel answered, "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening.*"

Samuel's response reminds me of Al Denson's song, "Be the One"

Remember the words?

Will you be the one to answer to His call?

Will you stand when those around you fall?

Will you be the one to take his light into a darkened world?

Tell me will you be the one?

*Though sometimes it's so hard to know
who is right and what is wrong.*

*Where are you supposed to stand,
when the battle lines are drawn?*

*There's a voice that keep calling out
for someone who is not afraid,*

*To be a beacon in the night to a
world that's lost it's way.*

*There're still some battles we must fight from day to day, if
the Lord provides the power for me to stand and say...*

Yes, I'll be the one to answer to His call.

I will stand when those around me fall.

*Yes, I'll be the one to take his light into a darkened world.
I will be the one. ... I will be the one!*

Conclusion

***Every man's life can be summarized by one sentence.**

***How do you want others to remember you when your life on earth has come to an end?**

***What do you want written on your tombstone?**

Will you join me in a lifelong pursuit of becoming a man or woman of God, remembering that...

We must first **listen**...and not ignore His call to us.

We must **respond**...and not hesitate or question His call to us.

We must **receive** His mercy and grace...and not reject His compassion to us.

We must **affirm** His call and word to us...and not deny it.

Use these closing moments of this Baccalaureate service to reflect upon your life. Where are you on your spiritual journey? How is your life being summarized?

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Mount Vernon Nazarene University
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