

Week 1 Preaching Resources: God's Purpose for You

Scripture Passage: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Focus Statement: God has a (different) purpose for everyone, even if it seems unlikely or calls you away from the "norm."

ME: Share about a time when you had a clear plan (vacation, ministry program, life plan, etc.) that changed in a dramatic way due to things outside of your control. Or talk about a time when someone/God has seen gifts in you that has changed your plans.

WE: Maybe our plans haven't changed as dramatically as (preacher's example), but if we reflect on our own lives, we can all find times when our plans - maybe even our purpose - has had to change. Moving, changing jobs, unemployment, sudden or chronic illness, the loss of a family member... all these circumstances can cause our path to change course.

Our scripture lesson, the anointing of David, has several examples of how the purpose or call on one's life can change in dramatic ways. It also provides examples for us of how, in our discernment of what comes next, God's plan and purpose often does not align with our human expectations.

GOD:

1. **Context:** To better understand the significance of this passage, we must first look back. Before Israel was ruled by kings, they had judges, men and women who rose within their tribes to lead the people, often during times of unrest with other nations. At first the judges were enough but over time, the threat of invasion coupled with unrest within the tribes led to chaos, even the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin.

The Israelite people realized that what separated them from other nations was that they had no king, so they demanded that God give them a king. The prophet Samuel was against this idea and tried to persuade the people otherwise, but eventually God told Samuel to give them what



they wanted- a king. The first king chosen by God and anointed by Samuel was Saul, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, a warrior or “man of valor.”

Saul is anointed as King for the purpose of saving God’s people from the Philistines. However, it isn’t long before it becomes clear that Saul is not the type of king that God wants, or Israel needs. Once again, the plan changes and Samuel is sent to anoint a *new* king – the boy, David.

2. God’s choice is not always the world’s choice. God tells Samuel, “The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). If the people had their choice of king, they would not have picked David. Contrast Saul and David. Saul was a warrior, tall, older (an adult), experienced, and from the tribe of Benjamin. David was a shepherd, younger (note: being young in the context was seen as weakness), still a boy, inexperienced, the youngest son, and from the tribe of Judah.

In choosing David, God chooses an underdog; it may even feel that God is going with someone completely opposite from Saul in every way possible. Yet, as God tells Samuel, God does not look at outward appearances, but rather looks at the heart – the character, gifts, and graces – of a person. How often have we judged a person’s ability to live into a calling or follow a specific purpose based on their outward appearance, credentials, rather or other assumptions we make about them, rather than taking into consideration their heart, character, gifts? When have we judged others unfairly? And when we have, we doubted ourselves or our own purpose because we assume God could not possibly choose us or expect us to do a certain thing?

3. God often sees something in us that we don’t or has a purpose for our lives that we can’t comprehend. Sometimes it takes another person to lead us on our path, as Samuel led David from the path of being a shepherd to being king of Israel. Then again, sometimes the path we are on is affirmed or cemented by our encounter with another, as with David’s older brothers. We learn that despite having been passed over as king, the three older brothers Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah, follow Saul into battle against the Philistines (1 Sam 17:13). Their purpose is evident in their continued commitment to protect the people not only of their own tribe, but all of Israel.

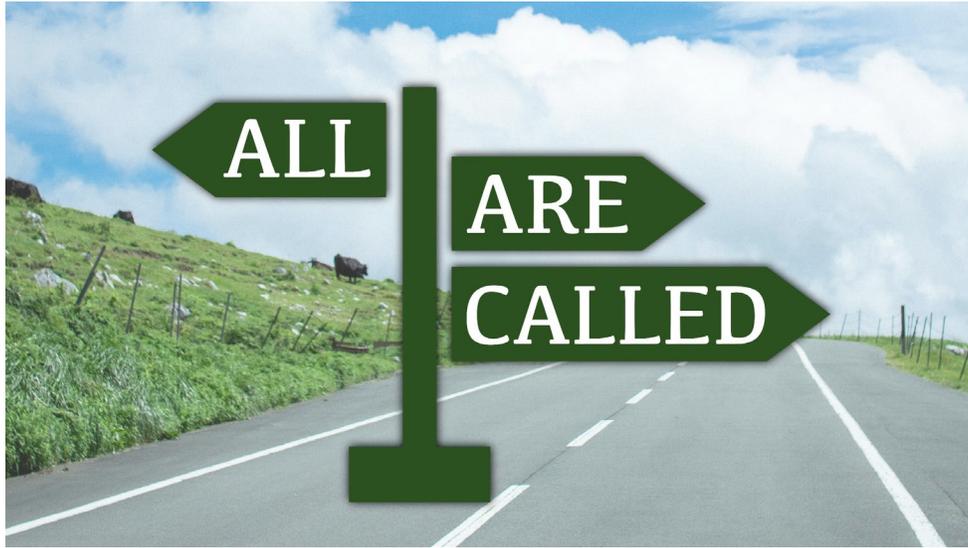


YOU: God called Samuel, Saul, and David for a purpose that was different than what they had planned. Samuel was raised to be a priest but was called as a young boy to be a prophet. Saul was a grown man, already established in his tribe, when he was called and anointed as to become king and to defeat the Philistines. David, whose path was set for him as the youngest of seven brothers, should have remained a shepherd, but was called as a boy to also become king, not only of his own tribe but of all Israel, eventually uniting the twelve tribes into one nation.

How do you make sense of God's calling or God's purpose for you when it is different from what you think or planned? You may offer some concrete suggestions people can follow (e.g., talking with a trusted friend, spiritual mentor).

If you have a program or system for matching people's spiritual gifts with service opportunities in the church, you might want to remind and direct people to that. You might highlight some opportunities to serve in the church or community and common misconceptions about what you have to "be like" to do them. If you highlight church opportunities, consider reminding people that when we are talking about call/purpose, it is not just about the church, but also listening and paying attention for God's call in your life more generally.

WE: Within this story we see how the purpose God has for us may be puzzling if we look at outward appearances. We may think we are too young, too old, too poor, too busy (etc.) to do what God is calling us to. And yet God often chooses the least likely person, turning things upside down, to do amazing things. What new and surprising thing is God calling us to today?



Week 2 Preaching Resources: Equipped

Scripture Passage: 1 Samuel 17:31-40

Focus Statement: God gives us the tools we need to fulfil our call. It might not necessarily look the way we expected or be the same way others do it, but God will create our own way for us.

ME: Share an experience outside of church that has been useful in your ministry setting. This is a time where you can share about talents that the congregation might not know.

WE: Invite the congregation to think about their gifts and talents that could be used in different contexts. How might they already be equipped to fulfill their call? Name gifts that are prevalent in your community that can be used for leading and encouraging others.

GOD: This passage shares how David was equipped by his prior (perhaps seemingly unrelated) experience to take on this new challenge (battling Goliath) that was before him. While David was not, at this point, an experienced warrior, he did know what it was like protect his flock from predators, just as Israel needed protection from the Goliath, the Philistine.

- 1) Like David, we are called to stay in the path God has set. This does not mean our path or direction never changes, but rather that we always pay attention to whether these changes or challenges are coming from God or somewhere else. David would not be deterred just because Saul did not think he was capable of battling Goliath. Like David, each of us is unique and will have our own God-given way to follow our call. While emulating others can be helpful, we need to stay on our own path. David could not wear the armor that was meant for Saul (verses 38-41). He had to fight the battle his own way. God gave David the wisdom and strength to stay on the path marked out for him. God will do this for us too, as we continually seek God's guidance amid pressures and influences from others.



2. Confidence is key to following your purpose or call. But confidence in what or who? First and foremost, David had great confidence in God. God was the source of his power. From within this space of confidence in God, David also recognized his gifts and had confidence in the execution of his gifts. God used all of David's experiences as a shepherd to help him face the battle with Goliath. God will use our experiences that made us who we are as we are called to face new things. God has prepared and is preparing us for things to come. Our "secular" experiences can be used for God – both within the church and outside of it.
3. David's example shows us about the relationship between faith and call. Calling is a journey; David's faith was what gave him strength for the moment. David knows God and for that reason he does not fear; he has experienced God's intervention and victory. When God calls us, we do not need to fear; we can trust God has equipped us with the tools we need.

YOU: David was not afraid to use his gifts. He saw other ways outside of being a shepherd to use his gifts. Too often we limit the use of our gifts, but God has equipped us to bring about the best. Our callings often go beyond the work of church operations. Share how vocational callings are sacred work. Help people to think about ways they might be called to use their gifts inside and outside the church to face new and unexpected challenges.

WE: Share with the congregation that this is the time for them to recognize and embrace all their gifts. As a church you have a diversity of gifts that can transform the world. What will you use to better your community (e.g., someone with the gift of storytelling might use it for witness and evangelism)? Invite the congregation to have confidence that God has already prepared them to step up in faith, just as God prepared David to face Goliath.



Week 3 Preaching Resources: Supported

Scripture Passage: 1 Samuel 20:1-17

Focus Statement: Answering a call is rarely easy or free from hardships. The support of good friends and community is essential; we don't have to do it alone.

ME: Share a story about a time when a friend has taken a great risk for you or someone you know.

WE: Who are the friends that we can depend on? Share one or two anecdotes about friends helping each other in your local congregation. Consider checking with small group leaders for these stories. Always ask people's permission before using stories about them in a sermon.

GOD: This passage is about the loyal friendship between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul. By this time, Saul and David were enemies. This story of friendship shows that when we experience hardship God can use our friends to support our calling. (Consider briefly summarizing how we got from last week's passage – where Saul was supporting David – to this week's passage – where it seems he might be out to kill David.)

Trust and empathy are key to the supportive relationship between Jonathan and David as David faces this challenge in fulfilling his purpose (the challenge of Saul trying to kill David). Jonathan was willing to listen and take seriously David's concerns that Saul was trying to take David's life, even though Jonathan didn't think his father would do something like that without telling him. You can see Jonathan moving from an initial reaction of disbelief (verse 2) to listening (verse 3) to being willing to act on David's behalf, for David's safety, even though it would have put him in an extremely uncomfortable position with his father (verse 4). In the same way David was willing to view Saul through Jonathan's lens, risking his own safety to see if Saul was going to do the right thing. They are willing to trust one another and see the situation from each other's perspectives.



Jonathan and David share a covenant of friendship. A covenant is an agreement with God and with a person/friend. God brought together Jonathan and David and their relationship was bound by their love for God (verse 8, “sacred covenant” – the NRSV notes that in Hebrew this reads “a covenant of the Lord”). This is a place where you can expand about the importance of covenants in the Bible. What are some things that can be learned from the covenant of David and Jonathan? The covenant was sacrificial as, in it, Jonathan gave up his kingship. It would also include seeking each other’s well-being and that of their descendants.

Sometimes other people place our friendship at risk. Sometimes our friendships require risk-taking. (This does not mean we should endanger ourselves for any reason just because it would help a friend. Jonathan’s risk-taking for David was well thought out, prayed over, and necessary). David would not have been able to fulfill his purpose as king without a friend like David. Often, we think we must do it alone or rely on our resources, but cultivating supportive, committed friendships and relationships is an important part of living of a purpose driven life (and supporting others as they pursue their callings too).

YOU: Encourage the congregation that God supports their calling through the friends around them. You may ask them to think about the friends and loved ones who support their call or support them in general. Who can they go to when they need help? This may be a time to share gratitude for their support.

At the same time, there may be people in your congregation who feel unsupported. You may consider offering pastoral care around this issue or reminding people of ways they can plug into the church community to feel more supported and connected (small groups, service opportunities, etc). Maybe this is a time for them to invest in their friendships and relationships, to cultivate mutual trust and empathy, and to support others the way they hope to be supported. Encourage your congregation to think about how they can make God the center of their friendships.

WE: As a congregation, we are called to support others in their calling and be true to our covenant by our honesty, loyalty, and trustworthiness. We are called to be open and sensitive to others’ experiences. We support our covenant friendships through encouragement, prayer and giving our full commitment to each other’s well-being.



Week 4 Preaching Resources: Affirmed

Scripture Passage: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 12

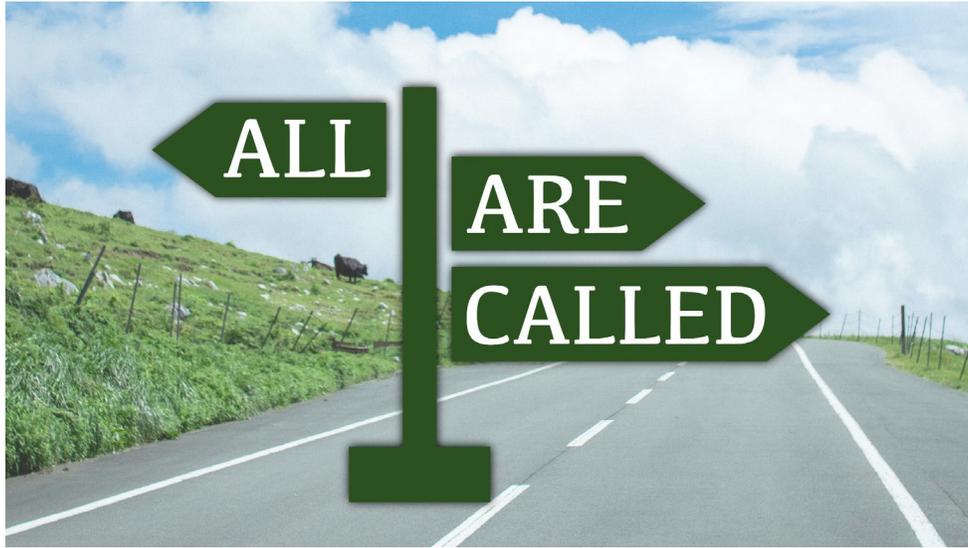
Focus Statement: It can be hard to know if we're really following our call, but people around us can affirm us and keep us on the right path. Sometimes we must trust God speaking to us through others over believing our self-doubts.

ME: How do you understand your calling, what did that process look like and who affirmed your call to ministry? You may also consider sharing a different time or way you were affirmed in a calling other than ministry.

WE: How do we broaden the understanding of God's calling into all facets of life – family life, secular work, relationships? How do we see our jobs as more than just a paycheck but also as a means and place of ministry, a calling from God as we live out our baptismal covenant?

GOD: The people remind David of his calling and what God has already done (verses 1-2). Sometimes we lose sight of our calling and God places people in our lives to affirm our call. David is not king on his own, but God has made him king. There is a juxtaposition here between David and how he is affirmed in his leadership by the people around him and Absalom, who self-proclaims his right to the throne (see 2 Samuel 15:7- 12).

God shows grace to broken people. David has a lot of weaknesses that would have disqualified him in today's context. God uses people in unexpected ways. How do we turn from judging people and their weaknesses to affirming God's call on their lives? Note, this does not mean we ignore or condone wrongdoing, but how do we see people's worth amid their brokenness and affirm them in how God is calling them?



Verse 12 shows David recognizing that God exalted him, not for David's own glory, but for the sake of the people of Israel. How can we begin to see areas of our life that before may have felt purely "about us" (e.g., work, hobbies/recreation, certain relationships, etc.) as places where we can fulfil God's call on our life and serve others? How can we, like David, begin to shift to the bigger picture of what God is doing through and around us?

David was anointed three times; first by Samuel in his father's house (1 Samuel 16:13); then when the tribe of Judah claimed him for their king (2 Samuel 2:4); and then in (2 Samuel 5:3) when all Israel did the same. God's calling is a process. We may not know what we are meant to do and where we are meant to go right away. It may take multiple different phases of life and affirmations from others for us to fully perceive and understand how God has called us just this purpose and place. Fulfilling God's purpose for our life is all a part of "moving on to perfection" (not perfection in the worldly sense, but in the sense of becoming more and more Christlike). We can give ourselves some grace here when we don't have it all figured out.

YOU: Have people think about the ways that they have been affirmed in their callings. Have others noticed gifts and graces in them that they had not seen before? Or, validated what they knew their gifts and graces to be? How can they act on that affirmation? How can they deepen their commitment to their call, perhaps in a new or unexplored area of their life? Or, if they are in a place of uncertainty about their call, who might they trust to give them feedback about whether they are going in the right direction? Also encourage people to think about ways they can affirm others.

WE: Since we believe God's calling is a process, where is God calling our church? What can we do to live out that call, affirmed by God, the leadership, and the congregation?