



Study 3 Called to Give

Our third study looks at God's call to us to use our gifts to help us along the journey together.

My Story

I remember attending a church family camp when I was living in Canberra. I was about 22 years old. I don't remember the theme of the camp. What I do remember, though, is leading one of the study sessions. With a great deal of nervousness I guided people who were much older than myself through a Bible study. This month I have been helping to plan another church family camp, and we've been looking for 'big name' speakers to invite to the camp. I am struck by the difference. The church and minister in Canberra placed a great deal of faith in a younger member of the congregation. They encouraged me to use and develop my gifts, small though these seemed at the time. I can look back over my time of growing up in the church and identify other times when a youth leader, a Sunday School teacher, a friend of the family, a minister, gave me some responsibility and a chance to discover what God could achieve through me. I believe that I am still part of the church today largely because of the trust and opportunity that were offered to me in those times.

Discuss

- *Tell a story about a time when someone encouraged you to use your gifts. What happened? How did you feel?*
- *Go around the group and focus on one person at a time. Others in the group say to this person, "One gift that I appreciate in you is..."*
- *How does it feel to receive encouragement from others?*
- *What prevents us from encouraging others?*

God's Story

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Samuel anoints David

This powerful story makes one wonder how much the fate of nations depends upon simple choices. About 200 years after the arrival of the tribes of Israel in the land of Canaan, Saul is chosen by the prophet Samuel to become Israel's first king. Samuel is the key figure in the selection of both Saul and David, bringing God's will to bear on the leadership of Israel. Saul has proven himself unfit to rule, and God sends Samuel to choose his successor. Samuel naturally looks to the eldest son of Jesse's family, yet finally ends up with the smallest son whom the father has left in the fields.



This story once again demonstrates God's way of choosing the unexpected - a pair of seventy year olds to travel to a new home, a murderer with a speech impediment to lead the Israelites from Egypt, a small shepherd boy to become the nation's greatest King, an insignificant Middle eastern nation to bring light to the world, a carpenter's son to be our Saviour. God sees the potential in each person. But God also has a way of doing something new by turning our ideas about power and greatness upside down. We are reminded that it is God's calling and God's power which turns a young shepherd into a mighty ruler.

Discuss

- *Read the story again quietly to yourself, and try to imagine the sights and sounds. Talk about what stands out to you about the story.*
- *How would Jesse and David's brothers have reacted to Samuel's choice? Look ahead to 19:2 to see how King Saul reacted.*
- *What does God's choice of David say to you about the way that God uses people?*
- *Who are the Samuel figures in your church today - the people who encourage the young ones and those in the background to use their gifts for God?*

Read John 9:1-41.

Jesus and the Blind Man

Light bursts into the darkness. John's Gospel paints vivid pictures of Jesus as the light coming into the world and into our lives. This story presents powerful images - Jesus spreading mud on the man's eyes; the man staggering from the pool with blinking eyes; the accusing disbelief of the Pharisees; the frightened parents; and the bold testimony of the man who was once blind. Jesus brings a dramatic change and a strong reaction from those whose lives he touches. As always he reaches out to those whom society rejects.



According to Barnabas Lindars, this story about the blind man is not just about healing. For John, it demonstrates the power of Christian conversion, and the washing in the pool is a reminder of Christian baptism. The blind man's ability to see is in stark contrast with the blindness of the Pharisees concerning Jesus' identity and power. The blind man is a threat because he shows that God is working outside the synagogue. The challenge for us today is to realise that God is working beyond the church to bring people to faith.

People in the early church who read this story would have been reminded of the opposition which they experienced, particularly the threat of being excluded from the Jewish synagogue. John reminds us that the experience of the true light of Christ is life-changing, but it is likely to invite disbelief and even hostility from other people.

Discuss

- *If you could take a photo of one part of this story to hang on your wall, which scene would you choose? Describe what you see in the picture. What impresses you most about this scene?*
- *What steps can you identify in the blind man's journey to faith in Christ?*
- *What does the story say to you about the way that Jesus touches people's lives today?*
- *Have you ever experienced hostility from others because of your faith?*
- *Who might the Pharisees represent in the church today? What do verses 39-41 say to us?*

Our Story

The Bible passages remind us that God chooses and uses those we least expect to accomplish surprising things, even in the face of opposition.

- *Which people in your church are the "Davids" - the ones whose gifts tend to get overlooked or ignored?*
- *What particular gifts do you see in the young people in your church? What are some ways that the congregation could encourage young people to use their gifts and have a say in what happens?*
- *Which people in your town are the "blind ones" - the ones that we would never expect to have an encounter with Jesus? Where are the places that we would need to go to meet with them?*
- *Discuss this statement:*
"We have been preoccupied with whether our churches are growing; we should be preoccupied with whether our mission is dying. We have been preoccupied with whether we are yet alive; we should be preoccupied with whether we are yet in the world."

Kennon Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership*, Harper&Row, San Francisco, © 1990.

1. Like a candle burning wildly
Raging soft against the night
Spark that leaps to clear the shadows
Sending warm disturbing light
We are called to live the passion
Hope stands strong against all pain
For it's only in the burning
That the candle shows its flame

2. Like a river running freely
Rapids swirl beside our feet
Swiftly flowing from the high land
Comes to rest, still waters meet
All our journeys rising, falling
Making turns we least expect
When the Spirit churns within us
Know God's power through the test

3. Like an angel walking lightly
On this fragile earth of clay
Touching folk with raw compassion
Laughing, playing on the way
Freely living every moment
In the mystery of grace
Giving, dying, living, rising
See the beauty of God's face

4. See the hope that burns in darkness
Show compassion, strong and kind
Bind the hurt and broken-hearted
Be God's hands and voice and eyes
Sing a new song every sunrise
Climb to places out of reach
Walk in freedom of God's Spirit
As we die so we shall live

Words: Craig Mitchell

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