



WEEK 2

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23 - SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD

Here I Am: A Lenten Journey of Obedience

JOEL SCHMIEG

Psalm 34:3-6

Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

The Apostle Paul and I have one thing in common that perhaps sets me apart from other pastors. I've not had a "blinded by the light" experience, nor have I ever been shipwrecked on an island (though I did have a trip to Malta planned before Covid ruined it...). The thing we have in common is tents. For both Paul and I, tents have played a significant role in our ministry journeys.

Now you probably already know that Paul was called a tentmaker in Acts 18:3. We're told that Paul went to stay with Priscilla and Aquila "because they were tentmakers by trade, just as he was." This was one of the ways that Paul made a living when he needed it. But you may not know the slightly lesser well-known story of the one-day pastor who pitched his tent in the wilderness of Rhode Island as he sought to follow God's call on his life.

You see, there was once a young couple who were living in England as missionaries when God suddenly called them back to the US, their home country. Upon return, they found that they did not seem to belong in the places they once felt at home. Over the years, they had developed a seemingly odd amalgamation of doctrine that caused them to feel out of place in their former churches and denominations.

I'm gonna cut to the chase here: their doctrine lined up perfectly with ECO, but they didn't even know ECO existed. Upon learning of ECO at a church-planting conference, the couple began asking God where He was calling them, and for some reason God put New England on their hearts. Armed with only a credit card and a 2003 Dodge Dakota, the couple drove 600 miles from Virginia to Rhode Island, stopping in only two places - first, NYC for pizza and a bagel, and second, REI for a tent to sleep in.

The couple figured the best way to see if God was really calling them to New England was to drive there, buy a tent, and see if they could find "secular" jobs while they waited for a more specific call. It was the only logical thing to do... Had they ever been to Rhode Island? No. Did they particularly like camping? Not really. But they felt strongly that God was calling them and they could see no other way of being obedient. There were certainly safer and easier options, but these two had no desire for conventional methods.

I'm running out of time, so I'm going to hit you with a shocking twist-ending. Remember that couple I literally just told you about? That was my wife and I. (Record-scratch.) And we lived in a tent for all of two nights before God provided a lovely couple in an ECO church to take us in while we searched for work. We lived and worked in Rhode Island for 15 months before we finally figured out where God was calling us to do ministry next. Yes, that's right - to Minnesota. (Double record-scratch.)

God did call us to New England, just not for the reasons we expected. We had our first child there. We made life-long friends there. We grieved and processed our ministry in Olde England there. We cried out to God daily from there. And finally, from there, God called us to our church in MN, the place where I would eventually be ordained an ECO pastor. Just the way I drew it up...

Moral of the story: beautiful things happen when we are obedient to God's call.

God, thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you that when we are weak and faithless, you are strong and faithful. Thank you for your sovereignty. Thank you for being the author of our stories. Give us the faith to trust in you today for our next steps. May we be able to sing, "I sought the Lord, and he heard, and he answered. That's why I trust in Him." Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - JOEL SCHMIEG



Joel is a newly-ordained Pastor in Minnetonka, Minnesota. He was born and raised in Central FL where he developed a strong aversion to the heat. He has gradually moved to colder and colder places before finally settling in MN. He will probably move to Alaska one day. He lives with his wife, Hannah, and two children, Cormoran, & Junia. His favorite drink is a "Presbyterian" (Scotch, Ginger Ale, & Club Soda).

Here I Am, Lord

ALFRED WANNER

Matthew 4:18–22

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. ESV.

When I became a student at Flourish Institute of Theology I was surprised by the number of students who were preparing for a second career in ministry. I expected to be one of a few older students, but there were others following a later call as well. When I read Matthew's account of Jesus calling his disciples several things jump out at me. Notice that the word immediately shows up twice in answer to the call. I surmise that Peter owned his own fishing boat. When he answered Jesus' call he was leaving the occupation that he knew. Perhaps some employees would no longer have a job.

The second set of brothers were working in a family business with their father. They left—again it says immediately—and followed Jesus. There were some additional things to consider when they were leaving their father and the family business. There were probably many generations of their family that had made their living as fishermen. This was leaving the family legacy. This was saying a loud “Here I Am.”

Having been involved in a family business myself, I am aware of how the family life is embedded in the business. Sacrifices of the family are sometimes necessary to keep the business running smoothly. This is what they knew. They probably enjoyed their work and planned to pass it on someday to their own sons. Scripture does not tell us about Zebedee's reaction. Did he say, “Here I Am. Take my sons and use them for your purposes?” Or did he respond, “Where are you boys going? How am I supposed to keep this business going without you?”

All four of these young fishermen must have asked themselves, How are we going to manage financially? We know that Peter was married. How would answering Jesus' call affect them and their families? I pose these questions to make the point that this was not a spur-of-the-moment decision like going for a walk with Jesus. This was a life-altering decision. This was a bold, immediate “Here I Am.”

Have you experienced that type of call? Perhaps not, but we all are called to follow Jesus our Savior in whatever way or place he has called us. Be ready to say, “Here I Am.”

Lord Jesus, help us to heed your call upon our lives. May we answer immediately, “Here I Am.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - ALFRED WANNER

I am a retired dairy farmer. I am a graduate of FIT in 2024 with an MA in Theology, currently serving as CLP Pastor of Pequea Presbyterian Church in Gap, PA 17527. This is the church that I grew up in and have attended ever since. Married to “Cookie” for 57 years. We have 3 children, 7 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

Calling and Obedience

B O B R E I C H , C L P

Romans 1:5–6 NIV 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (NIV)

In Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Henry writes, "The Christian profession does not consist in a notional knowledge or a bare assent, much less in perverse disputings, but in obedience. And all those, and those only, are brought to obedience of the faith, who are effectually called of Jesus Christ. Here is #1; The privilege of Christians; They are beloved of God and are members of the body which is beloved. #2; The duty of Christians; to be holy, hereunto are they called, called to be Saints."

As I reflect on this Scripture text and the theme of calling and obedience, it takes me back to 19 years of pastoral ministry at Mountain Presbyterian Church, and the past eight years leading an ECO missional community church. In both ministries I experienced parishioners who struggle with the call of God upon their lives, first for salvation, and secondly for mission and service. It is exciting to sit with them and listen to their life stories. In doing so, I often recognize how God was at work in their lives; first of all, drawing them unto himself, which resulted in their belief in Christ for their salvation, and secondly as their life story unfolded. It was obvious God had equipped them to be partakers in the advancement of his kingdom through their vocations and their service to the Church of Jesus Christ. To this end I witnessed God's work of affirming them. Ponder this, does your life reflect God's calling and obedience, and do you think of yourself as a thriving Christian?

During the season of Lent, we all have a wonderful opportunity to reflect on God's call upon our lives, and thus how we get to live out our faith journey. And so, the question that comes to my mind is, have I done all that I could do, and have I given of myself sufficiently to the work of advancing God's kingdom, that is, by sharing the good news of the Gospel? How about you?

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the privilege of serving you. Open our eyes to a deeper understanding of your love and the sacrifice you made for our salvation. Deepen our relationships with you so that we reflect Christ; that others called to salvation would see Jesus in us, the hope of glory. May this "Season of Lent" invigorate each of us with a new passion to live out our faith journey, our calling, and our obedience, to honor and glorify Jesus our Lord. In his name, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - BOB REICH

Virginia and I will be celebrating our 65th wedding anniversary this July. Our family includes two married sons (as a result of covid-pneumonia our oldest son went to be with the Lord in 2021), four grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. I worked in banking and served in a large agriculture credit and financial services cooperative for 33 years. As a CLP, I pastored a Presbyterian church for 19 years and currently serve as pastor of an ECO missional community church at Breezy Oaks RV Park, Bushnell, FL. We live in Winfield, PA, and spend our winter season in Florida.

Calling and Obedience

J D W I L H E L M

Jeremiah 1:4–8 4 The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” 6 “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” 7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

After my freshman year of college, I was invited to intern with the youth ministry at the church I attended during high school. Throughout the summer, I remember feeling as though I had somehow tricked the church. I couldn't believe I was actually getting paid to do something quite so life-giving. It felt as though I came alive for the very first time.

Upon returning to school in the fall, I felt a deep dissatisfaction with the direction of my life. Although I was unable to recognize it at the time, the Lord was beginning to stir my heart toward ministry. As I began to process those feelings of inner turmoil, a pastor asked me a crucial question: Did I simply love my experience working for the church over the summer, or was the Lord calling me into ministry? Over time, it became clear the Lord was calling me into vocational ministry. However, this period of discernment was prolonged due to a deep sense of fear. That fear wasn't rooted in doubt about my sense of call but in deep feelings of inadequacy. I didn't feel like I had the spiritual maturity, possessed the competencies, the leadership, or even the education for ministry.

There I was living in the dissonance of understanding God's call but lacking the courage to step into that calling. I was stuck and afraid to take the step out in faith. This fear of inadequacy is prevalent throughout the biblical narrative, particularly in call narratives. Moses clearly feels inadequate when he asks the Lord, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11). The prophet Jeremiah also struggled with these same feelings of self-doubt. The Lord speaks beautiful, life-affirming words to Jeremiah, and upon hearing those words, how does Jeremiah respond? He says, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young” (Jer. 1:6). His insecurities are on full display. In the case of Jeremiah, the Lord does not allow his youth to be used as an excuse, for it is God who equips Jeremiah for the role he is to play in declaring God's word to his people. Furthermore, he is assured of God's abiding presence. In the same way, God is the one who calls us, and he is the one who equips us. In fact, feeling inadequate for what God has called us to do is a good thing. It places us in a position of dependence. It requires us to humbly come before the Lord and allow him to work in and through us.

As I have entered each new season of life and ministry, those feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt again tend to bubble up to the surface. Yet I am reminded of God's goodness amid those feelings. Paul reminds us, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we confess that we often find ourselves stuck because of our fears and doubts. Our feelings of inadequacy keep us from stepping out in faith into what you have called us to. We forget that even before we were formed in the womb, you knew us and set us apart for the unique work you have for us. We know that you equip us and that you will be with us. Lead us out of the familiar setting of our doubts and fears and into a deeper trust where obedience is possible. For we know that you are faithful and you will surely do it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - JD WILHELM



I currently serve as the discipleship pastor at Grace Church Lake Highlands in Dallas, Texas. Over the years, I have served in ministry in various capacities. I served as a youth pastor in Austin, Texas, directed a wilderness discipleship program, and pastored a college ministry at Texas State University. I completed my undergraduate degree at The Ohio State University and a Masters of Divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary. Some of my favorite things include fly fishing, running long distances, reading, walking the dogs with my wife, and watching Ohio State football.

I Give My Life to You

J A N E T D U M F O R D

My story starts before my birth – my mother was pregnant when she went for the pre-op appointment for her hysterectomy. The doctors wanted her to terminate the pregnancy. My parents chose to postpone the surgery and here I am - now 50 plus years later. As a child, my older siblings liked to tell me I was a 'mistake' and my mom would always respond with 'no, you were a miracle'. And so, as a child, I was told, repeatedly, that my life had value.

I know not all of us have that gift – a constant reminder during our childhood that our lives matter. And yet, when we read the Bible, the reminder is there. God loves us, so immensely. He knows us, even before we are born. He sent his Son, Jesus, to be with us, an example for us. He then sacrificed Jesus for our sins. At Jesus' baptism, God said, "this is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) Before Jesus started his ministry, God was already declaring his worth. We can't earn God's love; His love is His gift to us.

Experiencing that kind of love and acceptance, it seems like a natural response to say, I'll go where you go, I'll do what you ask me to do, I want to be with you. And that was my response, I told God – I'll go, I'll do. I give my life to you.

And nothing dramatic happened. I think for some of us there is a fear that keeps us from saying those kinds of things to God. A fear of what He might ask of us. And sometimes God does ask for big faith as He reveals parts of His plan, but in my life, it has been one reasonably sized step at a time. They don't always feel like small steps, but typically they're just big enough that I know I need to rely on God to steady me as I go forward. Serving in ordained leadership (when I was raised Baptist), taking classes in coaching and Christian reconciliation in my 40s, serving on the Presbytery Council, becoming an Ordination Assessor...all steps I've taken as I continue to say, I give my life to You. These steps have led me into meaningful work and beautiful relationships. Many I would not have experienced otherwise.

Psalm 25: 1, 4-5 is a regular prayer of mine and I encourage you during this Lenten season to make it a regular prayer of yours and listen for the steps God is asking you to take. Experience His love and respond to it.

*O Lord, I give my life to you.
Show me the right path, O Lord,
Point out the right road for me to follow
Lead me by your truth and teach me
For you are the God who saves me
All day long I put my hope in you.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - JANET DUMFORD



Great Lakes Presbytery's Stated Clerk & Elder at College Hill Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, OH. Janet Dumford lived in five different states before making Cincinnati home. She worked professionally for a short time before starting her own business. She was ordained as an elder at CHPC in 2011 and has served in leadership positions in women's ministry, adult discipleship, and local outreach. She has held official positions in her local church (currently Clerk of Session), the Great Lakes Presbytery, and ECO. She has passion for connecting with people, peacemaking /reconciliation, and spiritual formation. Janet has been married to her husband, Chris, for 31 years. They have two fantastic adult sons and recently added an amazing daughter-in-law to the family. She loves to travel and is looking forward to a trip to the Pacific Northwest this spring.

Knowing His Voice, Following His Call

L I N D S A Y W A Y M I R E

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." — John 10:27

Scripture is full of stories about people who heard the call of God—sometimes it was crystal clear, other times less so—but those who heard the call of God all had to decide whether to obey and follow God's call. Abraham left everything familiar for a promise unseen. Moses stood barefoot before a burning bush, arguing with the voice that called him. Mary said yes to a plan that would upend her life.

Jesus models this perfectly. His life was one of intimate dependence on and complete obedience to the Father's will. He said, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me and the one who sent me is with me" (John 8:28–29). For Jesus, calling and obedience were inseparable and rooted in the love of the Father and his desire to please him.

For me, my call into vocational ministry happened both over time and then all at once. In my early 20's, I was struggling for purpose and direction while in a lucrative sales job, realizing that the only thing I could whole-heartedly sell to someone is Jesus. My efforts and restlessness revealed a desire I had all along. It took time for me to uncover that my deep conviction—that Jesus is the only way, the truth and the life - was actually a "call" for me to orient my life around and follow Jesus as the only way, the truth and the life. After this realization, I was enrolled in seminary within the month and have been following his voice ever since. This "call" has required faith in the unseen and an obedience that has sustained me through some rough places, relationships, and really difficult seasons of ministry in the church.

Calling is deeply relational, and it is a partnership with the purposes of God through us. Before God gives a task, He gives Himself. "I know them," Jesus says - intimacy before instruction, connection before commission. Knowing God's voice shapes our call but also gives us what we need along the way to live it out with him. Abraham, Moses, Mary, and all the rest of us hear the "call" and follow where he leads, and in faith are promised a reward both in this life* and the next** when we obey. Sometimes obedience looks like stepping out, and sometimes it looks like staying still. Sometimes it means leaving a place; other times, it means remaining faithfully where God has planted us. In all cases, our "yes" to God's voice gives us an invitation to participate in His purposes—and to reflect His glory.

*Deut 28:1–2, Josh 1:8, Is 1:19

**Matt 5:12, Rev 22:12

Prayer: Lord, you are a good shepherd. Thank you for speaking and that we can know your voice. Help us be expectant to hear you before we speak, to look for and follow you before we lead, and to act with your love in all we do. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - LINDSAY WAYMIRE



Lindsay Waymire has been on staff at Grace Commons Church in Boulder, CO for the last 18 years serving in a variety of roles. She is currently serving as the Director of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship and just finished the ECO ordination process. Lindsay has been married for 23 years to Jeff and has 3 kids. Her favorite thing is rooting for her kids and enjoying God's creatures (animals of any kind); she has a horse, 5 fainting goats, 2 dogs, and a cat.