

God's Calls and Timing

When God calls us to do something, God uses familiar, if not always recognizable, methods. From within, God gives us ideas, dreams, and 'aha' moments, when we feel extraordinarily inspired. From without, we receive insights and suggestions from other people, whom God has inspired to share with us.



Discerning a calling from God is a first step. Next is timing. When does God want us to begin?

The Challenge of God's Timing:

Recognizing God's timing to respond to a calling can be challenging. Following are some insights, which I pray will be helpful.

Immediately

Scripture informs us: God's timing has a history. *Immediately* is God's most often used. In that instance, God's calls *from* and *to* are made in the same breath.

An example is Mark 1: 17, 20. Jesus said, "Follow me," to fishermen, who were tending their nets. He invited them to go *from* their work *to* do something else – and Mark says this happened *immediately*.

Immediately is how we can experience God call to go *from* one thing *to* another. For example, we may be inspired to decide, *now*, to go from this job to that job; or to leave our current career for a new one; or move from where we live to a new address, town or region. The gap between *from* and *to* can be *immediate*.

Wait

Sometimes, God wants us to *wait*. This can be an 'uncomfortable' prayer space. When God calls us to change something, waiting – the *now what* - can be especially difficult.

- If we are normally impatient, we may cry out, "God, be reasonable. Do it now."
- If we are normally patient, it is tempting to pray, "God...I'm willing to do what you want. Let's do it now."

To help us with our waiting challenges, we have Jesus' experience to inspire us.

Jesus Waited

Luke 4: 1-13 records what happened to Jesus, as he waited for God's call to begin his Messianic ministry.

Jesus had been a tradesman. He was the firstborn in his family. Presumably, he did much in his workplace to support his family. Then, God called him to go *from* his family, home and trade *to* the wilderness...and *wait*.

Luke records that Jesus waited *a long time* for God's call *to...* As he waited, evil came and tormented him. Jesus persevered by patiently trusting God; refusing to give in to evil; and by relying on Scripture and prayer for help.

What Can Happen When We Wait?

One of Luke's points is how upsetting waiting for God can be. But, when we're in that waiting gap, Jesus' experience can help us respond to anything evil might do. Following is my personal case study as an example.

Several months ago, I discerned and accepted God's call to retire. God gave me ongoing peace. Our Bishop, colleagues, parishioners and friends affirmed my decision. But, at night, bad dreams upset my sleep. I don't remember the dream-details, but I do remember two recurring themes: guilt and anxiety. Evil was at work!

Mercifully, my training and Spiritual Director helped me sort out what was happening:

- *peace* – is always present and strong, which only God gives
- *guilt* – about retiring is neurotic, a grief-related feeling, not a spiritual defect
- *anxiety* – about the future is neurotic, probably also grief-related, not realistic

As a Type A (A for *alleged*), waiting is not what I do well. So, there is much comfort for me in Jesus' experiences! The details of our stories are different, but evil was and is common in both. Evil hit me where I am vulnerable – at sleep and in dreams. Jesus experiences; God's gift of unwavering peace; spiritual direction; my training and experience, have helped me to wait in the gap between: retirement *from* and *to* -?-

Conclusion

God's calls are in two steps. First, calls us *from* something. Then, God calls us *to* something else. In between, there is a time period. Sometimes, it is *immediately*, as the fishermen experienced in Mark's story. Other times, it is *wait*, as Jesus experienced in Luke's story.

Immediately is gratifying. *Wait* is evil's opportunity for mischief. Always, God is present. God always blesses us, including as we wait (eg, *peace*).

For God's calls to us, expressing how much God loves and values us, thanks be to God!