

## Chapter Six

### “PRINCIPLES OF VOCATION: MOSES AS OUR MODEL”

There is one profound difference between human beings and all other creatures on the face of the earth. In fact, some scientists have suggested that this is the unique ingredient that makes a human being human! Apparently, we are the only creatures who ask the question, "Why do I exist?" We are the only creatures who have enough of a sense of the uniqueness of ourselves to wonder, "For what purpose do I exist? Why was I born and why do I live today? Why was I placed on this planet?"

### PEOPLE AND PROFILES OF VOCATION

In the chapter, “**People of Vocation**”, we surveyed a large number of people in the Bible -- some extremely well known and strategic and some relatively unknown and apparently peripheral to the “heavenly vision”. There were two significant observations about these people. The first is that most of the people used by God in the Bible were not religious professionals. Instead, most were lay people. In fact, when one looks at the scripture, one is shocked to see how few religious professionals were actually used profoundly by God. Essentially, it is the laity who is used by God throughout biblical history.

Second, all those used by God felt called to a vocation of serving humanity in a particular way. These vocations covered a wide spectrum, with different people feeling called to address a broad sweep of human needs. Some saw this vocation as a life’s work, such as Jeremiah who felt he had been called to be a prophet from the time he was in the womb (Jer. 1:4-10). Others lived into their call for a short portion of their lives, such as Epaphroditus whose call to serve Paul (Phil. 2:25-30) probably lasted only a couple of years. Some of these lay people lived out their vocation through their occupation, while others served God and humanity outside their occupation. But what is the common denominator of all these lay people was that they all felt called by God to a vocation of serving humanity in a particular way -- and saw that service as a service of God.

In the next chapter, “**Profiles of Vocation**”, we studied more closely specific people who had followed Jesus. Although we surveyed all the disciples and all the women who had followed Jesus, we looked intensely at four people: Peter, Judas, Paul and Mary Magdalene. What we discovered was that each of these people was a unique personality with great potential. Each of these people was profoundly affected by an encounter with Jesus that caused them to look at the direction of their lives. Each of them was either molded into becoming the servant of God Christ was calling them to be -- or intentionally choosing to reject Christ’s offer of discipleship to them.

Except for Judas, all of the disciples and women were drawn into becoming one body in Christ. Each was his or her unique personality -- some being extroverts, others introverts, some feeling-driven people and others thinkers, some were intuitive and others lived by the data of their senses. But what

was unique was that they were all drawn into becoming one Body of Christ, so that that Body had the totality of human experience that none of them could have as individuals. From these profiles, we learned that vocation is not so much built on one's gifts or abilities or skills; vocation is built upon who you are as a person -- a unique person made in the image of God so that you can play a particular role for humanity in God's economy.

We have seen how comprehensive is the emphasis on vocation throughout the Bible. We've seen how individual people have been called as the unique personalities they were, shaped by Christ and transformed into a single community. Now we want to reflect upon one single life in order to discover the primary principles of vocation. And we will do this by examining perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive account of vocation that occurs in scripture. To do that, we will look at the life and ministry of the great liberator -- Moses!

## **PRINCIPLES OF VOCATION: MOSES AS OUR MODEL**

Moses was a man who seemed blessed by God. The baby of Israelite slaves, Moses was rescued from almost certain death to be adopted by the daughter of the king of Egypt. Raised as her son, Moses was "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22).

### **The First Principle: God prepares us for our call by breaking our hearts, spiritually forming us, and breaking through to us.**

Growing up in the royal court of Egypt and grandson to the Pharaoh, what would this prince of Egypt (Heb. 11:24-26) have learned? First, there would have been his formal education. The topics he likely pursued in school would have been political science, public administration, military science, the Egyptian religion, history, literature, geometry, geography and perhaps even engineering and hydraulics.

But there would have been his informal education as well - the "school of hard knocks". As a participant in the life of the royal court and as a military commander, Moses would have learned a great deal about political intrigue, the use of power politics, the relative effectiveness of confrontation verses compromise. In the military campaign Hebrew tradition tells us he led into Ethiopia, he would have learned much about commanding and leading an army, mobilizing a large force of people, setting strategic and tactical objectives, and handling the logistics of limited resources.

Now, if you had asked Moses why he was learning all of this, he would likely have responded, "In order to someday be a competent ruler or administrator of Egypt." But God had Moses learn all these things for an entirely different purpose.

### **God Prepares Us By Breaking Our Hearts over Human Need**

When Moses had reached forty years of age, the Scripture tells us, he happened into the Israelite slave encampment and saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. His blood rose at such injustice. Taking matters into his own hand, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand.

Moses thought he had gotten away with his act of vengeance. But by the next day, the deed was known throughout the land of Egypt. Moses, realizing he was now a wanted murderer, fled Egypt and escaped into the desert.

In this story, the young Moses is described to us as a person with a strong sense of justice. That commitment to justice is handled in an immature way, because the story suggests a leader who is impetuous, devious, believing that he had the right to judge and to wreck vengeance on anyone acting unjustly.

There is no indication in this scripture that, at this time, Moses identified himself as a Hebrew. One could argue that his defense of the beaten Hebrew slave was because Moses felt a kinship with that slave. However, the text doesn't suggest that. It could be equally argued that Moses acted in the way he did because he was a man who cared a great deal about justice, and he saw an overlord beating upon a slave -- so Moses simply acted to stop such an act of injustice.

Nor is there any suggestion in this text that Moses had any knowledge of or relationship with God. It could be argued that, raised as an Egyptian, Moses worshipped the Egyptian gods and was ignorant of the God of the Hebrews. There is nothing in this biblical account to suggest any awareness of -- much less commitment to -- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

### **God Prepares Us By Spiritually Forming Us**

Escaping from the wrath of Pharaoh, the criminal Moses arrived in the land of Midian, stopping by a well to rest. The daughters of a priest of Midian came to the well to draw water. But then shepherds also arrived and, wanting the water for themselves, drove away the women. Again, Moses' hatred of injustice was raised and he attacked the shepherds, driving them off. The daughters, grateful for his intervention, took him home to meet their father who invited Moses to settle with them. Eventually, Moses married one of the daughters, raised a family and settled down to the life of a shepherd. Thus had the mighty fallen!

Moses' defense of the daughters of Reuel (Jethro) lends credence to the argument that Moses' attack upon the Egyptian was fueled by his commitment to justice, not to his sense of kinship with the Hebrews. It is a further indication that what drove Moses was the defense of anyone who was being treated unjustly -- whether Hebrew slave or Midianite women. Apparently, both the sense of justice and the tendency toward impetuosity ran very, very deeply within Moses.

Over the next forty years, Moses lived as a shepherd on the backside of the desert -- caring for his father-in-law's sheep, raising a family, and living life a far cry from his former experience of the Egyptian court. Presumably, he believed that this was to be the remaining pattern of his life -- that all the glory of being an Egyptian prince lay behind him, and that he would live the remainder of his life and would die as a desert shepherd.

But in the forty years Moses spent as a shepherd in the desert, he was "back in school" - learning about how to survive in a desert, learning to read the "signs" of a desert, learning the routes to and locations of the oases of life-giving water. He would have learned about animal husbandry, desert health-care and the nature of primitive communities. In his daily life, tending sheep on the backside of the desert, this former prince of Egypt learned much about humility, helplessness, weakness and the relative meaninglessness of an ordinary peasant's life. But most of all, he would have learned about God and himself.

From his father-in-law and the desert people, Moses was first introduced to the God of the Israelites - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There he learned to embrace the faith of those who trusted in the God of Mount Sinai -- the God who was above all other gods, the God who was unknowable, the God who had no name! There is no suggestion in the book of Exodus that Moses knew anything about the God of the Israelites before he lived with this Bedouin family, or even wanted to know. But there in the harshness of the desert, Moses discovered a god of compassion and justice (Exodus 2:23-25).

Now, if you had asked Moses why he was experiencing all that he was learning in his desert existence, he would likely have responded, "In order to survive as a shepherd in the desert". But God had Moses learn all these things for an entirely different reason. And that reason revealed itself on one memorable day that would forever change Moses' life.

### **God Prepares Us by Breaking Through To Us**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock . . . to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the . . . Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. . . . God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then God said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. . . . Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt!' (Exodus 3:1-7, 10)

God had been working in the life and heart of Moses for eighty years to prepare him to be the great liberator and lawgiver of Israel. Over that eighty-year period God had worked in Moses, teaching

him the wisdom of Egypt and of the desert, awakening within him his deep commitment to justice, and spiritually forming him in the solitude of caring for sheep where much of his impetuosity was tempered with a new humility and wisdom. Now it is time for God to break through to Moses with a clear and unmistakable call. This God does through the incident of the burning bush.

First, in the burning bush, God directly encounters Moses and reveals to him who God is. He identifies Himself with “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (3:6) But God takes Moses a step further in God’s self-disclosure to the prince-shepherd.

But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”. He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM (Yahweh) has sent me to you.”’ God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations.”’ (Ex. 3:13-15)

Second, God moves to new depths in Moses’ heart. God shares with Moses a new understanding of who He is and therefore what God is capable of doing in the world.

To the Israelites, a name was crucial. The name of a person symbolized the nature -- the very essence -- of that person. Therefore, when Moses asked for God’s name, he was making a significant request. He was asking God to reveal his basic essence to him. To return to the Israelites with God’s name (and thus with God’s essence) would give Moses the power he needed.

God’s answer to Moses’ question, “What is your name?” was this -- “I AM WHO I AM.” In Hebrew it reads, “God said to Moses, ‘Yahweh.’”

Yahweh is God’s name. The word can’t be translated into English. “I Am Who I Am,” the usual translation, is deceptive since it implies a state of being. The actual Hebrew word has more a causal sense to it. “I become what I become,” or “I will be what I will be” might be more accurate.

By telling Moses his name, God identified himself and his essential nature. By using this name, God proclaimed that he was neither a regional deity (to be confined to one country over which he had sovereignty) nor a nature deity (controlled by the cycles of nature). Yahweh -- *by the very fact that he was named Yahweh* -- was the God who was sovereign over history. The name “Yahweh” revealed God as the creator and controller of history.

God told Moses to return to the Israelite slaves with the message that the God who created the world was their God -- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their God, Yahweh, is the God who controls history -- and thus, controls the Egyptians! Israel’s God, Yahweh, is the God who creates the future -- and thus, can create a new people out of a fugitive bunch of slaves led by an escaped convict wanted by Egyptian law. By revealing his name, God told Moses to return to the Israelite slaves with

the news that the sovereign king of the whole universe was about to lead them out into freedom -- and no principality (even Egypt's pharaoh) could stop them!

Third, God revealed to Moses that he -- the humbled Sinai shepherd -- was to be God's instrument to free God's people from slavery. The specifics of that call we will examine in the next section.

In this story of the preparation of Moses, we see demonstrated the model God uses to prepare you and me for that purpose for which God created us. God prepares us for that work God would have us do by breaking our hearts, by spiritually forming us, and by breaking through to us. God prepared Moses to be the great liberator of Israel by first breaking his heart over a specific human need -- the injustice the powerful practice upon those who are marginalized, defenseless and powerless. Thus, Moses defended the Israelite being beaten by the Egyptian taskmaster, and he defended the women being driven from the well by the shepherds. God broke Moses' heart, over-and-over again, with the injustice of the world.

But such sensitivity to human need is insufficient to truly discern God's call in one's life. God also put Moses on the backside of the desert for forty years - a former prince of Egypt, highly educated and experienced in commanding armies, forced to live the life of a nomad and shepherd among the poorest of the poor. And this God did to bring Moses to himself, to make him aware of his own inadequacies and deep spiritual need, and to thus teach him to rely, not upon his own intelligence and zeal and enthusiasm, but to rely upon the Lord.

And finally, God prepared Moses by breaking through to him in a new way and at a specific time. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and Moses' life was forever changed. God did two things for Moses in God's encounter with the prince-shepherd. First, Moses had a profound, life-changing meeting with God. Second, Moses discovered God's call upon his life in responding to human need. Our intense awareness of human need and God's spiritual formation of us are steps God takes in our lives to bring us to that moment when God will meet us and declare, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt".

This, then, is the first principle of biblical vocation: God prepares us for our call by breaking our hearts, by spiritually forming us, and by breaking through to us.

### **The Second Principle: Everyone Is Called to Serve God by Ministering to a Deep Hunger of the World, But Discovering and Carrying Out that Call Only Comes Out of God's Interior Work In Us.**

A young evangelist, Rev. Robert Pierce, was preaching in cities of China just in front of the advance of the Red Army as it carried out its victorious conquest of that great nation in 1949. One day,

as Bob Pierce finished the evangelistic service, he walked into the crowd to greet people, pray with them and be responsive to them.

Suddenly, a young mother thrust a baby into his arms, said quickly, “Her name is White Jade. Take good care of her”, and disappeared into the crowd. Pierce stood there, holding the baby. But what was the young evangelist to do with her?

What Rev. Pierce did was to find an orphanage and take the baby there. He was in for a surprise. The administrator of the orphanage refused to take the baby. “We are completely full”, she said, “and we don’t have any money to accommodate another child.” Pierce emptied out his pockets, but there still wasn’t enough to care for that baby. So he did the only thing he could do. He sold his airplane ticket (and his escape) out of China to someone who wanted to flee the advancing Red Army, and thus bought care for White Jade. But now, he had no means to get back home.

That night, Bob Pierce wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible a prayer that came out of that day’s experience. This was what he wrote: “Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God.”

Bob Pierce eventually got out of China, and returned to the USA. He continued to pray that God would show him how to respond to the pain of orphan children in the world. The result of that prayer was that Bob Pierce founded World Vision. The largest Christian relief and development organization in the world began with the willingness of a preacher to let his heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. (Exod. 3:7-10)

What was breaking God's heart in the story of the Exodus? The oppression of the Israelite slaves. What broke Moses' heart? The oppression of the Israelite slaves.

Throughout his entire adult life, Moses had hated injustice. Whenever he saw oppression of the weak, the marginalized, the powerless, his blood boiled in rage -- and he acted (sometimes fool heartedly) on that rage. Now, suddenly, at the burning bush, Moses discovers that what has been breaking his heart for eighty years has been breaking God’s heart since humankind had first been created.

Moses now faces the reality that God is calling him -- as God's hands, feet and mouth -- to do something about such injustice! So Moses realizes that the vocation for which God had been preparing him all his life was to confront the political, economic and religious systems and the spiritually-oppressive powers of Egypt (symbolized in the person of the pharaoh), to defeat them in Godly battle (the plagues, the Passover), and to lead the oppressed Israelites into freedom!

But the Moses who stood before the burning bush was not the Moses who had killed the Egyptian tormentor or rescued the Midianite maidens. God had been at work in Moses' life in his forty-year exile in the desert. And God was now meeting powerfully with Moses at the burning bush. Over the years, Moses had matured, as God had done an interior work in him, so that even his deep hunger for justice had been seasoned.

(God said,) "So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (God) said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." (Ex. 3:10-12)

In Moses' response to God's call to him, we see demonstrated the significant change that had occurred in Moses spirit over his forty-year desert exile. In the desert -- and now, on Mt. Sinai, God has become more than just a word to Moses!

The Moses of an earlier year would have leapt at God's call to confront Pharaoh and to lead the Israelites into freedom. That would have been a natural and even inevitable response, given his combination of commitment to defend the cause of the poor and oppressed and impetuosity. But at the burning bush, we see Moses shying from that call of God's. He immediately questions his capacity to accomplish that action. His response demonstrates that he has become more realistic and honest regarding his abilities. It indicates his willingness to accept the role as a shepherd that fate seems to have dictated to him. But it also indicates his growing maturity in his relationship with God.

Moses realizes that, if God is not in the plan to set Israel free, that plan is doomed to failure. The call to liberation must come from God. And that God must be the God who can defeat the Egyptian gods and can set Israel free, because He is the God of history. If God is indeed Yahweh, then that comes as amazingly good news for Moses, for it is that God who can send him to Egypt and can empower his struggle with Pharaoh. Only if Yahweh is indeed Yahweh, and only if Yahweh has authentically called him to do this work, will Moses even begin to consider the possibility of doing it!

Moses would never have discovered that what was breaking his heart was also that which was breaking God's heart if his hasty, ill-conceived action in Egypt had not failed and he had been forced to flee for his life. It was his forty years in exile that brought Moses to himself and prepared him to discover that God had placed in his heart, all along, that rage against oppression that God also felt. And it was only in the spiritual and literal desert of his seemingly ruined life that Moses could discover the

purpose for his life. Second, you are called to serve God by ministering to some need or brokenness in the world, but discovering and carrying out that call only comes out of God's interior work in you.

### **The Third Principle: A Call Always Comes as Frighteningly Good News for Which We Feel Incompetent and Over-extended.**

(God said,) "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" . . . Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you' . . . But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." . . . But (Moses) said, "O my Lord, please send someone else!" (Ex. 3:10-11, 4:1; 4:10; 4:13)

When God tells Moses he is to go to set free the Israelites, Moses responds, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11) Obviously, the once proud Moses had been humbled.

Actually, Moses' sense of incompetence is somewhat laughable. Overwhelmingly intimidated by God's call, Moses uses every excuse in the book to get out from under this unsought obligation. First, he says, "Suppose they do not believe me or listen to me?" God demonstrates to Moses the power God has bestowed on Moses to carry out that task; he instructs him to throw a stick on the ground and it becomes a snake, to put his hand in his cloak and it becomes leprous, to pour water on the ground and it becomes blood. All of that isn't going to impress Pharaoh and Israel?

Stripped of that excuse, Moses says, "O my Lord, I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." God gives to Moses the eloquent Aaron to be his mouthpiece. Finally, in desperation, Moses whines, "O my Lord, please send someone else." Now he has gone too far. And God simply commands, "Go, and I will be with you!"

This would not have been the response of the young Moses. The young Moses would have leapt at the opportunity! Now, the aged Moses hesitates, waffles, stutters and is clearly both uncertain and intimidated by the demand God is placing upon him. But why is it important that Moses be intimidated by his call? As long as Moses thinks he is competent to carry out this call, he will seek to carry out that call in his own strength. If, on the other hand, he is intimidated by the complexity and size of what he is called to do, then he'll always be dependent upon God.

*Feeling overextended or incompetent is the sure and certain sign that you are called to a particular work for God. If you feel, "No way can I do that", then it is probably God's will that you do it! It is tremendously important that we be intimidated by our call. If we are not overwhelmed by what God is asking us to do, we won't be dependent upon God. Instead, we'll trust in our own abilities*

-- as did Moses when he killed the Egyptian. And you can see what a mess Moses made out of it when he trusted in his own abilities.

A friend of mine uses the phrase “frighteningly good news” to describe call. I like that! Your call will come to you as “good news”, because it is a call to address that which you are deeply heart-broken and concerned about. But it will also come as “frighteningly” good news, because it will look overwhelming. Third, God's call to us always comes as frighteningly good news for which we feel incompetent and over-extended.

### **The Fourth Principle: God Always Adequately Prepares and Gifts Us for Our Call -- Although We May Not Perceive It.**

God always adequately prepares and gifts us for that call. Although we may feel intimidated by that call, God is not intimidated. God has selected just the right person to carry out that work - you - and God has adequately prepared, gifted and graced you for that work. This truth God demonstrates to Moses in a most tender and compassionate way.

"But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." (Exod. 4:10-12)

Isn't that beautiful? Moses feels overwhelmed and inadequate to the task. But God very tenderly says to him, "Moses, I made your mouth. I gave you the capacity to speak far beyond your expectations. If you step out in faith and do what I am calling you to do, you will discover a capacity in yourself to articulate your thoughts you never dreamed possible. Trust me to call forth and use the gifts that lie dormant in you - for I have filled you and skilled you in order to use you to change the world!"

This is a theme that occurs over and over again in scripture. A person must first be humbled before her call, so that she sees himself as inadequate. Then, out of that sense of being overwhelmed, God in essence says to her, “Look, I have adequately gifted you to carry out this call. Go and do it!” God shows us that we are qualified and adequately gifted for the task, precisely because the task so often intimidates us.

If you are called to do a particular work for God, God has already prepared, gifted and graced you for that task. But we likely do not perceive it. The gifts are all there but likely they have not been called forth, precisely because it is the living into that call that calls forth those gifts.

Twenty-five years ago, I sensed that God was calling me out of the pastorate and into an international ministry, working to empower the urban poor and to equip urban pastors around the world. The invitation of World Vision International to head up their international urban ministry effort

provided the opportunity to live out that new call that was such “frighteningly good news”. When I began my ministry with World Vision, I felt very adequate and competent to be the pastor of a local church. But the work to which I was being called made me feel overwhelmed and very much out of control!

Out of that sense of helplessness, I became terribly concerned that each training event of pastors I led throughout the world would be done “just right”. Consequently, I would write out detailed presentations consuming reams of paper! But one day, a Brazilian pastor whom I greatly trust said to me, “Bob, you know your stuff. Why do you need all that paper? Just share what you already know!” So, taking his admonition seriously, I threw away my reams of paper and started to teach with just a few notes in front of me.

What I discovered was that all this writing of detailed material was actually a crutch that was getting in the way of my authentically communicating with people. When I prepared carefully beforehand but spoke extemporaneously, I found my presentations greatly improved. The situation and the urging of a good friend called forth the gift that had been in me my entire ministry, but which I had never discovered or perceived about myself because I had never been pushed to “try out my wings”.

So the fourth principle of vocation is that a person who is called is already prepared, gifted and graced for that task -- but may not perceive it and may not have had those gifts called forth. If a person perceives himself as adequately gifted but is not intimidated by his call, he will become arrogant. If, on the other hand, she is intimidated by the call but does not perceive herself as adequately gifted, she will become overwhelmed -- and will likely not enter into that call. So to truly live into a call, one needs to feel both overextension (to keep you humble) and recognition that you are adequately gifted (to keep you motivated).

### **The Fifth Principle: We Need Each Other to Effectively Carry Out Our Call.**

When Moses lamented that he was intimidated to face this overwhelming assignment on his own, God replied,

What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. (Ex. 4:14-16)

Further, God said to Moses:

Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “Yahweh, The God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I

have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.” They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, “Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go!” (Ex. 3:16-18a)

Moses, Aaron and the elders were all necessary to each other in order to carry out the call to “let the people go”. Moses was the visionary leader, the one chosen by God to lead Israel out of bondage and to win the struggle against Egypt and Egypt’s king. But Aaron was both priest and the voice of the revolution. Moses refers to himself as “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Ex. 4:10); tradition states that Moses had a speech impediment -- probably a stutter. Therefore, he needed someone who could speak more eloquently before the pharaoh than could he.

The elders were also strategic to this liberation effort. First, they blessed it, and confirmed Moses leadership of it (4:28-29). They willingly followed Moses, and of course their action became example to the entire nation. The elders maintained the discipline of the Israelite resistance. And once the Israelites had been set free and had moved into the desert, it was the elders who maintained the life and the discipline of the community.

All of these leaders were necessary to enable Moses to carry out his call. Together, they became a leadership team. Together, they also became a community of believers, encouraging and supporting each other in their common commitment to carry out the call that had begun with Moses but now had become their call as well. Only by working and being community together could Israel be freed from Egyptian slavery.

So it was that Moses never went to Pharaoh alone. Rather, in every confrontation with the Egyptian king, Aaron accompanied Moses and the elders of Israel stood behind Moses. When Moses led the children of Israel across the Red Sea and to freedom in the Sinai desert, it was Aaron who conducted their worship, Joshua and Caleb who organized and marched the people, Miriam who led the people's celebrations, Jethro who helped Moses to delegate authority and the elders of Israel who met with him, prayed with him and supported him through the forty years of wilderness wanderings. Moses was God's man to lead the Israelites to freedom, and God had prepared him and developed his gifts over eighty years of internship to carry out that leadership. But Moses did not and could not have done it alone. Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Caleb, Jethro, the elders all joined with Moses in working, leading and praying together to bring about the greatest nonviolent resistance and freedom movement in the history of the world.

So we cannot stand alone, either. We need each other to discover and carry out our respective calls to serve God by serving people. It is only within a community of believers that we can discover our purpose for living, which we can support each other in that ministry to which we are mutually called, and in which we can care about each other's spiritual sustenance and formation.

One person can't effectively minister to a deep hunger of the world to which she has been called. In order for such ministry to occur, it must be undertaken by a community of believers who respond to the call of the one, embrace that call as their call, care about each other's spiritual sustenance, and work together to carry out that call.

The story of Moses is the story of a man who was obedient to the heavenly vision given to him. Although he was at times rebellious, resistant, angry and impetuous (even as an old man), Moses was faithful to the call given to him by God at the burning bush on Mount Sinai. And here was the result:

The Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went; and he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. The people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped. (Ex. 4:27-31)

And Israel was set free!

## CONCLUSION

These are the five primary principles of vocation presented in the Scripture. As we have demonstrated from our extended study of scripture over the past four chapters, every human being has been created and chosen by God to serve the deep needs of humanity in a particular way. From the example of Moses, we learn that the process God uses to bring us to action on our call is fivefold:

1. God prepares us for our call by breaking our hearts over a human need, bringing us to Christ and spiritually forming us, and breaking through to us in decisive ways;
2. We discover our call by exposure to human pain, but primarily through deepening our relationship with God;
3. An emerging call always comes as "frightening good news" for which we feel overextended and/or incompetent;
4. Each of us so called is adequately prepared, gifted and graced by God for that task -- but we may not perceive it and may not have had those gifts called forth or confirmed;
5. One person can't effectively minister to a need of the world to which he or she has been called unless that call is carried out within a community of believers who also feel themselves called, support each other in that call and care about each other's spiritual sustenance.

The story of Moses demonstrates to us that God has a purpose for every single human being's life, that God prepares us for that purpose both by our everyday life experiences and by our growing relationship with God, that God will make clear to each of us God's call upon our lives, that such a call will always come to us as intimidating, frighteningly good news, that God over the years has gifted and

prepared us to carry out that call upon our lives, and that God has given us each other to sustain, encourage and work with us as we seek to be faithful to that purpose for which God created and has called us. In the next four chapters, we will examine much more closely these five principles of biblical vocation.

We began our reflection in this chapter with my observation that the human being is the only animal that asks, "For what purpose do I exist?" The biblical answer to this eternal question is quite specific. You and I exist to serve God by serving humanity in specific, concrete ways. God created you and is calling you to let your heart be broken with some human or world need that breaks God's heart. And until you allow your heart to be broken with the things that break God's heart, and allow yourself to be open to the call of God's Spirit, you will live your life dissatisfied and in relative meaninglessness. Our hearts will always remain restless until they rest in our faithful following of God's call to us.

In the story of Moses, we see demonstrated the magnificent process through which God takes every human being who is willing to discover and carry out God's call upon her or his life. Dear reader, this is the magnificent work that God wants to do in you and through you! That is the purpose for which you exist!