



2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE Monthly Devotions August 2019

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Hearing & Responding to God's Call

Opening Prayer – feel free to take prayer requests for the community, lifting up the concerns of those gathered and setting apart your time together. Or if you need a format, you can adapt the following prayer.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous. We especially lift up those who are on our hearts and minds ... Guide our conversations and our work this *day/night* and help us to listen for your voice and show forth your love in our words and actions. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Reflection

For the fact that August is over 2/3 of the way through the year, it has become a month of new beginnings. While the weather probably hasn't changed much, with the start of the school year, summer is officially drawing to a close. Very soon (if not already) all of those things that took a summer break – Sunday school, Bible studies, choirs – will be starting back up. That makes this a great time to take a breath, pause, and reflect on what God is calling you to do in your community (both within and outside your church walls) as the fall draws closer. If you have a mission and/or vision statement, now might be a good time to pull it out and pray about how to live into it for the rest of the year. And the fact that this month corresponds with reading the prophets (and Lamentations) is great timing.

Throughout the Old Testament, God has called his chosen leaders and prophets in various ways. Moses was called when a voice spoke from a bush that was on fire but not burning – an event sure to catch his attention. Samuel was called by a voice as if in a dream, although he needed an older and wise mentor in Eli to help him understand that it was God calling.

However, through much of the Old Testament to this point, the leaders of Israel have been born into the work of their family. While it is true that God did regularly call ordinary people to lead or speak a needed word to God's people – it was far more common for the next leader to be the son of the last. After all, how many genealogies have you read (or maybe skimmed) so far! And that makes sense, because to this point you have read the family history of God's people. You know who they are and where they've come from. You know who God is and what God has done for God's people.



You've read through the beautiful poetry of the psalms as you read through the ancient song book for the daily life of God's people.

However, if you are following the readings for the year, you are now to the prophets and the prophets are different. Instead of being a family history or a song to sing, each prophet is a person who is called by God to deliver a message to God's people. The prophets did not choose this work. Instead, they were chosen – called by God. A prophet's call story is incredibly important to understanding the prophet's message and ministry. After all, they don't have a family tree to fall back on. They only have a message, and it's rarely a popular one. And the call stories of the 3 major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) are the most well-known, powerful, and unique.

I encourage you to read the call stories of Jeremiah & Ezekiel (and Isaiah if there is time). Or if there is less time, pick one (personally Jeremiah is my favorite). As you read or hear the story, listen for what God is asking each to do, how the prophet responds, and how God prepares or equips each prophet for the work he is called to do.

- Isaiah 6:1-13
- Jeremiah 1:4-19
- Ezekiel 2:1-3:11

Questions for Discussion

- If you read multiple stories – which one resonates with you more than another, and what about the story stands out?
- What is God asking the prophet(s) to do?
- How do the prophets feel about this? How did they respond?
- If you were in their shoes, how would you feel about this?
- How did God prepare or equip each prophet for the work they are called to do?

Wrapping up & Looking Ahead

Did you notice that each prophet is touched on the mouth – a seraph touches Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal (of cleansing and forgiveness), God touches Jeremiah's mouth giving him the words, and Ezekiel literally eats the words as a scroll is placed in his mouth. For each of these prophets, there is a physical touch as the word becomes a part of them.

While we may not (at least all of us) have call stories like these prophets, in Holy Communion the bread and wine, body and blood touches our lips. We are both called and equipped by God to speak God's word for the world. As you get back into ministry after the summer, take another look at your mission or vision statement. Or simply take a few moments to reflect as a group on questions like these:

- what God is doing in your community and where God might be calling you?
- Is there a ministry that is floundering that you need to let go so something new can flourish?



- Or is there a ministry that is floundering because it needs nourishment and what might that look like?
- What new leaders are there, and what encouragement or equipping do they need to be the leaders God is calling them to be?
- Is God calling you to hold the course, or chart a new direction?

Closing Prayer – feel free to pray in your own words or to use one of the prayers below taken from the ELW

Gracious God, you have called us to varied tasks in the world and in your church. Grant us joy and a spirit of bold trust, that our work would point others to you. Stir up in each of us a willingness to listen for your voice and respond to your call; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. Grant that we may use them to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your will, so that we may share with all your church in the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

