

Ezekiel's Call — How God Calls Us To Serve Him

For some reason God has chosen humans to share the gospel to other humans and help them grow in the faith. Consequently, from Genesis to Revelation God has called patriarchs, prophets, apostles, church leaders, and every believer to serve Him! We are very familiar with Ephesians 2:8-9. The verse tells how a person is saved. It says,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

Here we are told that every believer is saved by grace through faith. That is, faith in Jesus Christ. The message of Scripture is that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It is by God's grace that we have been saved. It is a gift. We cannot earn salvation by doing good deeds. Consequently, He gives us the faith to believe the facts about Christ. He gives that faith to those whom He chose before the foundation of the world to be saved (Ephesians 1:3-5). Because He gives us the faith, we understand the gospel and want to be saved. So, we call out to God to be saved. Romans 10:13 says,

**"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
Romans 10:13 (NASB)**

All of this happens at the moment of saving faith and not because we did good works, were baptized, or did anything

else. Ephesians 2:8 says that we are saved as a gift. God gives everything to us! We cannot earn it. We are saved because He chose us. As a result, we cannot boast about anything. That is the message of Ephesians 2:8-9.

Now we must not miss verse 10. It says,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

Notice that Ephesians 2:10 says believers have been created in Christ Jesus for good works which He determined beforehand. This is also part of God's plan. Now a believer can do

good works. He has planned certain works for each believer to perform. He has given us a mix of spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit. He wants us to use them. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts to

each believer. 1 Corinthians 12:5 adds that the spiritual gifts He gives are designed for various ministries. Here is the verse.

And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 1 Corinthians 12:5 (NASB)

As we minister for the Lord, 1 Corinthians 12:6 explains there will be different effects or different results. The verse says,

There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 1 Corinthians 12:6 (NASB)



I believe this occurs because the mix of spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives to each believer differs. The point is that God has called every believer to minister for Him to other people. God has not called just the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and church leaders to serve Him. Ephesians 2:10 says that God has called every believer to do good works, which God prepared beforehand. His has already determined them. They are different for each believer. Every believer must discover God's calling for our lives, and on other occasions God reveals His will in surprising ways! That happened to the man Ezekiel.

Our study is about God's calling of Ezekiel. The good news was that God wanted this prophet to serve Him. The bad news was that most of the people who heard him would reject his message. So, it would be a mistake to think that his ministry was a failure since very few responded to him. Success in ministry is not marked by numbers. At the end of our study in the book of Ezekiel, we will greatly respect this dear and faithful man of God after we discover how he suffered. But we must not think that God's calling of a man or woman is fundamentally any different than when God calls any other believer. The biblical principles are essentially the same. God calls and He expects us to respond. We will discover that the measure of success in ministry is not numbers but a willing heart and faithfulness. Our study is Ezekiel 2:1-7. We are going to learn four principles about God's calling upon a man or a woman to serve Him.

GOD HUMBLER HIS SERVANT FIRST. The first principle about how God calls us to serve Him is found in Ezekiel 2:1. The verse says,

Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" Ezekiel 2:1 (NASB)

For us, chapter one of Ezekiel was exciting. We were in awe of the dark storm clouds with the flashing fire, the light, and the glowing metal in the midst of the cloud, with the silver lining of light around it. We saw the four cherubim, the four wheels, and the glory of God on a throne on top of the cloud. When Ezekiel heard the voice of God, Ezekiel 1:28 says that he fell to his face to the ground. He was humbled by the vision, the reality that God was present, and the voice that he heard.

The vision was intimidating!

Then in the first verse of chapter two, God humbled Ezekiel more when He commanded, "Son of man stand on your feet." The term "son of man" is an important title. When "Son of Man" is applied to Jesus, it has a special meaning. It is used of the Messiah in Daniel 9:13. But that is not the meaning here in Ezekiel 2:1 when it was used of Ezekiel because he was not the Messiah. The Hebrew for "son" is *ben*. It just means "male descendant." The Hebrew word for "man" is *adam*. That is, God called Ezekiel a descendant of the first man, Adam. Daniel Block in his commentary on Ezekiel said that God called him a human.¹ So, we could reword verse one as, "Human, stand on your feet that I may speak to you." Notice that God did not call him by his first name. Instead, God reminded him that he was a creature whom God had made. God was speaking to someone He had created. Wow! What a humbling experience for Ezekiel. Now some of us might have been offended.

So, why did God do that? Someone once said that unless God hurts a man deeply, He cannot use him greatly. That is what God did to this man. God was humbling Ezekiel with the awesome vision and now with "Human, stand on your feet . . ." God does the same to us before He can use us greatly!

When we began reading chapter one, we knew that God had chosen Ezekiel to be His prophet, but Ezekiel did not know that. This prophet to be, was in fear at the end of chapter one and now he is reminded of his inferior and vulnerable position as a creature before Yahweh. This gives us our first principle which is that God humbles His servant before He uses him or her.

The same pattern has occurred with others. God visited Abraham when he was in Haran, commanded him to go to a land that He would reveal to him. Then God gave him a promise. Now that sounds wonderful, until we read in Hebrews 11:8-9 that Abraham left Haran without knowing where he was going. Imagine leaving without knowing your destiny. After awhile, the uncertainty would become difficult. We are also told that he left for a foreign land. Now that would be humbling. He left his friends and familiar surroundings, and God was His only guide. Eventually, he was to become the

¹ Daniel Block. The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24. The New Testament International Commentary on the Old Testament. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1977. p. 114.

father of a great nation. That was God's promise.

Joseph was humbled. God allowed him to be sold to some Midianite traders who then sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. Then Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of sexual assault, and he was thrown into prison. He spent years in prison. He helped one of the men in prison who then forgot about him. But eventually, he became second in command to the pharaoh of Egypt.

The same principle is illustrated in the life of Moses when he lived in the Midianite desert for forty years before God called him into ministry. David was humbled because of Saul. The major and minor prophets were humbled. The apostles were humbled, especially Peter and Paul. So, the first principle is that God humbles His servant before He can use him or her. That principle applies to us too! He will humble you too, if he plans to use you. He may even humble you while you are in the ministry, because He has even greater plans.

GOD EMPOWERS HIS SERVANT. The second principle in our study is found in verse 2. The verse says,

As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. Ezekiel 2:2 (NASB)

As God spoke to Ezekiel, the Holy Spirit entered Ezekiel. This does not mean the Holy Spirit started indwelling Ezekiel. The Holy Spirit simply entered him in order to empower him for ministry. But this does not mean the Holy Spirit remained. The promise of the indwelling Spirit is given in Jeremiah 31:31-34 as part of the new covenant. It was a future event. Remember that in the Upper Room Jesus said that the cup was symbolic of His blood of the new covenant. So, Ezekiel was not indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit, but he was filled with the Spirit in order to serve Yahweh.

There are many examples of this principle in the Old and New Testaments — Joshua, Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Saul, David, Isaiah, all of the prophets, and many others. The prophets and other writers of Scriptures had to be filled with the Holy Spirit when they wrote Scripture. All of them were empowered so that they could serve the Lord.

Yet, we must not forget that Jesus said in John 15:5 that without Him we can do nothing. Then in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7,

Paul said that we may plant and water, but it is God who gives the increase. Then Paul surprises us when he says that each one is rewarded according to his own labor. So if God causes the result, why are we rewarded? We will discover the answer later.

So, since Pentecost the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts to every believer for different ministries, which produce a variety of results. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit and walk in the Spirit because Ephesians 3:16 says our inner man needs to be strengthened. So, Ezekiel was empowered for the ministry that Yahweh was about to give to him. The same principle applies to us. This gives us the second principle of how God calls us to serve Him. He, Himself, empowers us for ministry!

GOD DETERMINES EVERYTHING ABOUT OUR MINISTRY. The third principle is found in verses 3-5. In these three verses, God now tells Ezekiel everything about his ministry that he needs to know. He does not tell Ezekiel what will happen during his ministry. God does not reveal at this time what messages Ezekiel will be told to give to the people. God only gives this new prophet three important facts about his ministry.

We will start with verse 3. First, God tells him to whom he will be sent. Every servant of God needs to know to whom he or she is being sent. Otherwise, he or she does not know where they are going. Verse 3 says,

Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day." Ezekiel 2:3 (NASB)

Notice that God told Ezekiel that he is being sent to people and not to an organization. Over the years I found that churches often function like organizations and not organisms. They are more concerned about the mechanics, policies, money, the business matters of the church, and how many ministries the church has rather than a concern for the people. They think more about the institution than the people. But that is not true of God. He tells Ezekiel that He was sending him to the sons of Israel—the descendants of Jacob and to his twelve sons.

The second thing that God does is describe the spiritual condition of these people. He said they are a rebellious people and they have rebelled against Me. When Yahweh made these statements, He uses two different Hebrew words for rebellious and rebelled. The first Hebrew word is *marad*. It refers to someone who revolts. That is, they have been revolting against Yahweh. Then Yahweh repeats this Hebrew word when He said they, “have rebelled against Me.” They have a pattern of revolting against Yahweh.

When Yahweh says they “have transgressed against Me,” He uses a different Hebrew word. It is *pasa*. It refers to someone who breaks a covenant or a relationship. It has a sense of breaking relationship with Him. Both words imply a people who do not care about their relationship with God. They want to live as they desire. They do not want to obey, and so they do not.

Next, Yahweh uses another word that reveals the situation is even worse. When He says “people,” He uses the Hebrew word *goy*, which was usually used for Gentiles. That is, the sons of Israel are acting just like the Gentiles, as though they are not part of His family. What was the primary characteristic of the Gentiles? They worshiped other gods. Sexual sins and other grotesque behavior was a primary part of idol worship. The Gentiles would sacrifice their children to their gods.

Today, the world has a religion called sex. The western countries have added abortion. Sex is worshiped again as it was in the Old Testament era. It is impossible to avoid. The topic is everywhere. I keep remembering 2 Peter 2:7 which says that Lot was oppressed in Sodom by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men. Today, true believers are oppressed just like Lot was. It is all around us day-after-day.

Yahweh told Ezekiel, “I am sending you to this people who have rebelled against Me. God sends us to people like that today too! They may be inside or outside of our churches. Recently, I read a comment by Dr. J. Vernon McGee. He said that some of the most difficult people to reach for Christ are in the church. They often feel comfortable about themselves because they attend church. They love the music, friends, and moral preaching. They have never realized their great need to be forgiven.

Verses 4-5 continues Yahweh’s message.

“I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ As for them, whether they listen or not — for they are a rebellious house — they will know that a prophet has been among them. Ezekiel 2:4-5 (NASB)

Now God says they are stubborn and obstinate children. They are like teenagers in the home. The Hebrew word for stubborn has the idea of “hard-faced.” The Hebrew word for “obstinate” is “hard-hearted.” That is, Ezekiel would know they have hard hearts by looking at their hard-faces—no embarrassment, no sorrow over sin, and no repentance, just excuses or nothing. The last part of verse 5 reveals that most likely they would not listen to Ezekiel. That is happening in our churches today.

Now we have our third principle. God determines everything about our ministry. He determines to whom He will send us. He knows the spiritual condition of the people, and He already knows how they will respond. I do not think God is pleased with some servants who are not willing to suffer in the ministry.

GOD MEASURES SUCCESS BY WILLINGNESS AND FAITHFULNESS. The fourth principle about how God calls us to serve Him is found in v. 6-7.

And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. Ezekiel 2:6 (NASB)

Now Yahweh said, “Human, do not fear them or fear their words.” He says the words of these people to whom I am sending you are like thistles and thorns and like sitting on scorpions. He is referring to the abusive words of the people. Ezekiel would be speaking for the Lord, but they will reject His words. The sons of Israel are revolting against God and they will hate His words. As children we would shout that sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. But they did hurt. God knows that. So, Yahweh said do not fear their words or be dismayed by their presence.

Verse 7 explains why Ezekiel was not to fear their words or be dismayed by their presence.

And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house. Ezekiel 2:7 (NASB)

The reason is that God gave him the message to speak. He was to ignore their objections. He was not to worry or try to please them. But today, many pastors and church leaders try to please the congregation. They fear rejection by the congregation, and so they adjust the worship service and the messages to please their people. What is worse is when churches are run by the congregation. The result is the leadership seeks the opinion of the congregation and then govern the church accordingly. That was not God's command to Ezekiel. God did not ask Ezekiel to take a survey or respond to their complaints and do the ministry accordingly. That is, God had chosen Ezekiel as a prophet, and sent him to these hard-faced and hard-hearted people. So, Yahweh said, "Preach it anyway!" God told Ezekiel to be faithful. Do not listen to them. They are rebellious! "Preach My message."

This gives us the fourth principle about God's call upon us to serve Him. It does not matter to whom, where, or the spiritual condition of the people. God's measurement of success is our willingness and our faithfulness to teach what God has said.

CONCLUSION. We have learned four principles. The first principle is that Yahweh humbles His servants before He will use them. Then He fills them with the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish His purpose. The third principles is that Yahweh chooses the people to whom His servant is to minister. Notice that God did not ask Ezekiel what kind of ministry he wanted or to whom he wanted to minister. God does not ask us either. He just assigns it to us through circumstances, and an inner compulsion confirmed by needs and people. It is important that we do not seek to minister to just the "nice people." Ezekiel was not sent to nice people.

As soon as I say that, I have to admit I have met some people in the church who act like the world, and some are in church leadership. Listening to their words is like brushing up against thistles and thorns and sitting on scorpions. Dr. J. Vernon McGee said this in his commentary on Ezekiel,

were to ask me whose position I would rather not have—Daniel's, Jeremiah's or Ezekiel's—I would say I would rather not have Ezekiel's.²

We must notice that Daniel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were contemporaries. But Yahweh did not ask Daniel to perform Ezekiel's ministry. Daniel was 60 miles (97 km) away in Babylon working in the king's palace. But Ezekiel was with the exiles on the River Chebar. Daniel was working with the leaders of the empire, but Ezekiel was with the exiles from Israel.

Also, God does not ask us which ministry we want. Instead, our sovereign God has a plan. He is executing that plan. He has an assignment for every believer, as long we have not disqualified ourselves due to sin or refusal to serve God. I once knew a man who believed that he had refused the call of God, and later was very sad that he had said no.

Moses almost refused his ministry when he met God at the burning bush in Exodus 3. When Moses met God, He told Moses to go and speak to Pharaoh. Then Moses repeatedly objected, complaining that he could not speak. So God made Aaron the spokesperson for Moses' ministry. I suspect that if Moses had continued objecting, he might have lost all of his ministry. He could have lost the joy of serving God.

The third principle is that God determines everything about our ministry. That is true for a pastor, a missionary, a church leader, a Sunday school teacher, a Bible study leader, or whatever ministry He desires to give us. He has determined the people, the place, and the response of the people. This is true for every servant of the Lord. However, we must remember that God has told the congregation to submit to the elders of the church (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17). In God's sovereignty, He works through His leaders.

The fourth principle reveals that God measures our success by our willingness and faithfulness to Him, and not by the opinions of the people to whom we are sent. Some are rebels and others will respond to the Word of the Lord. In God's conversation with His prophet, God said, "Ezekiel, be willing and be faithful." The apostle Paul said this in 1 Corinthians

Ezekiel did pass through a great deal of suffering. If someone

² J. Vernon McGee. Book of Ezekiel. Thru the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1982. p. 443.

9:16-17,

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. 1 Corinthians 9:16-17 (NASB)

God calls us to serve Him faithfully. That is, God's standard of success. That is the basis for any future rewards.