

Third, Moses requests some proof to convince the people that God is powerful enough to rescue God's people. God does a few miracles (i.e., turning a stick into a snake, turning Moses' hand leprous and then healing it) to convince Moses, who will then convince the people. Moses does not have the power needed to free the people, but God does. Once again, Moses cannot refute God and must search for another excuse.

Lastly, Moses says, *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.*" Moses tries to discourage God from choosing him by claiming that he is not a good public speaker. God reminds Moses that it is God who gives mortals their speech. Still not making any headway, Moses lays it out for God: "O My Lord, please send someone else."

Don't you hate it when someone gives you excuse after excuse? They try to wear you down so that you'll let them off the hook. Don't feel badly; it happens to God, too. Exodus tells us that God gets angry with Moses; but rather than letting Moses off, God sends Moses' brother Aaron with him. Aaron will do the talking, but Moses still has to go.

You know how the story plays out: Moses goes to Pharaoh; there are ten plagues; the people go free; Pharaoh chases them; God parts the Red Sea and the people cross into safety; Moses leads them through the wilderness for forty years; and Moses dies within sight of the Promised Land.

I call this the evolution of the call. Moses begins by actively resisting God's call, but in the end he is fully on board with God's plan for God's people. This evolution came about as Moses trusted less in himself and his own abilities, and put his trust instead in God whose power is limitless and whose vision far exceeded his own.

I see my own call to ministry evolving along similar lines. From my initial place of resistance to God's call, I have come to the place where I want to be part of God's plan for me, for my family, and for this congregation. My initial resistance resembled the excuses of Moses: I didn't think myself good enough to serve; still forming my faith, I was undecided about my belief in God; I wanted proof positive that God could would back me up if I answered the call; and, as an extreme introvert, I shuddered at the thought of leading worship, leading a prayer, or even leading a meeting. And yet, like with Moses, God answered my excuses, not always to my liking, but always to fulfill God's plan.

So, I tried bargaining with God. I'll go to seminary, but only after I've saved up enough money to go debt free. I'll earn the degree, but I won't work in the church; I'll teach church history at

a college or university. I'll submit to your will just so far, but don't push me outside my comfort zone. Each time I set conditions, God said, "Ok, we'll try it your way first." Needless to say, as my call to ministry evolved, I was consistently drawn out of my comfort zone and challenged to put the needs of God's Kingdom ahead of my own desires.

And every step of the way God surrounded me with people who encouraged me, helped me, loved me, and challenged me to grow into the person God created me to be. What's more, I can look back now and see that God was with me each step of the way. God never let me off the hook, but God never let me dangle on the hook, either. God sometimes put me in difficult spots, but God never abandoned me. God often challenged me, but God also gave me the skills and tools and supporters I needed to succeed. God persistently invited me to be part of God's plan, then patiently countered my excuses until I saw the wisdom of doing things God's way.

The inventor Nikola Tesla said: "It is paradoxical, yet true, to say, that the more we know, the more ignorant we become in the absolute sense, for it is only through enlightenment that we become conscious of our limitations. Precisely one of the most gratifying results of intellectual evolution is the continuous opening up of new and greater prospects." Put another way: the more we learn about God, the more we realize there is to know about God. Choosing to be a part of God's plan, while challenging, is ultimately more fruitful.

The disciples learned this lesson by the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus called them, they had been out fishing all night without success. He challenged them to try again, casting their nets on the other side of the boat. They resisted, made excuses, but ultimately did as he requested, and their catch almost swamped the boat. The disciples didn't know much about this Jesus, but they knew he could fish. Following Jesus meant going places and doing things they never thought possible or probable; but following Jesus opened up for them a new life and the promise of God's Kingdom.

The evolution of the disciples' call had its ups and downs, its rough starts and grievous mistakes. So does mine, so does yours. But through it all, God is with us, the Master Planner at work. God never says we have to get it right all the time; God just asks that we make the attempt.

And so, as my call evolves, I find myself in places I never dreamt I'd be, doing things I never thought I'd do, surrounded by people more wonderful than I could ever imagine. Perhaps the most surprising part of my call is the increasing role I play as a teacher. I love the passage from Isaiah: *The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the*

weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens — wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards (50:4-5).

I draw great strength from this passage. It is God who has given me the tongue of a teacher, God gifts me to explain God’s Word and to offer compassionate care to the weary with the comfort of God’s Word. “Morning by morning he wakens,” means that every day God is with me, waking me to do God’s work. God wakens my ear “to listen as those who are taught.” Each morning God calls me anew to be open to God’s Word for that day, ready to hear and respond. When I hear that Word and respond, when I turn to God and follow God’s way, I am being true to my calling as a disciple.

I know that my call is still evolving. My ministry ten years from now might look very different than it does today. The course my ministry takes is up to God, and if I listen carefully and faithfully, I will adjust my sails to meet the wind God sends to move me forward. I have learned some valuable lessons during this evolution.

- God is patient with me: my call advanced slowly, over time, as I was able to accept each new part.
- God has a sense of humor, moving me about and putting me in situations I could not predict.
- God can use me for God’s purposes: I make mistakes or bad choices, but God will not forsake me.
- God loves me the way God made me: I’m not like anyone else, I don’t do ministry like anyone else.
- God has something in mind that only I can do with the gifts God gave me.
- God is greater than my excuses, weaknesses, failures, doubts, and mistakes.
- God is always with me: I am never alone.
- God is great, and worthy of my best effort.
- God still has work for me to do with the people at The Federated Church.

The Evolution of My Call

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The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Isaiah 50:4-9a* and *Luke 5:1-11

Moses is probably my favorite biblical character because his life story and my life story are so similar. No, I was not floated down a river in a basket, nor was I rescued by a princess and raised in a palace. I have not murdered anyone, nor am I a fugitive from the law. I’ve never tended sheep in the wilderness. I have not encountered God in a burning bush. I did not deliver God’s people from slavery. I do not have a walking stick that draws water from a rock or splits the seas. I have not wandered in the desert for forty years.

Okay, so maybe my life is a little different from Moses’ life, but in one key aspect we are very much alike: we both tried to dissuade God from calling us by making excuses. When God appeared to Moses and called him to lead God’s people out slavery in Egypt, Moses balked. The Book of Exodus records four excuses Moses gave to dissuade God from choosing him.

First, Moses asks God; “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” Egypt’s Pharaoh was the greatest king in the world at the time, revered as a living god by the Egyptian people. Moses, a humble shepherd, a member of a minority race, a fugitive from Pharaoh’s justice, rightly questioned his suitability for this task. God brushed that excuse aside with the promise: “I will be with you” indicating that this would be a battle between God and Pharaoh, with Moses acting merely as the messenger.

Second, Moses asked, “Who are you?” Moses wanted to know God’s name; and God gives that wonderfully straightforward answer: “I AM who I AM.” Which means that God is the creator of the universe, the source of all life. Put simply, God is. Not much argument Moses can make to that. The name of Moses may not carry much weight, but the name of God, the Great I AM, will resonate with the people.