

A READER'S THEATRE PRESENTATION
OF
CALLED BY GOD

by Edward A. White

- Reader 1: Our language betrays us! Clergy are “called by God” to ministry of the Word and Sacrament, but everyone else goes out and “finds” a job.
- Reader 3: What do we mean by Call?
- Reader 1: We mean that God has a purpose for each person’s life. The primary call is the call to discipleship. Jesus said to the first disciples: Come and follow me.
- Reader 2: The call is to be a Christian more than just to do something. The doing becomes a living out of the being. Like a marriage—one is called to be a husband or a wife. The doing grows out of living in the role and in the relationship.
- Reader 1: Baptism expresses God’s claim on our life. Living out the life of a follower of Jesus is the fulfillment of our Call from God in Baptism.
- Reader 3: Yeah! Listen to this: I once conducted a pastors’ retreat for a group of twenty-seven pastors. One of them mentioned that a friend of his had just “received the call to full-time Christian service.” So I asked him what that meant.
- Reader 4: Oh, he got the call to go to seminary and become a preacher!
- Reader 3: I thought we believed that every Christian was called to full-time Christian service. I thought that’s what baptism meant...God’s claim on our whole life—whether we’re a homemaker, a schoolteacher, or a lawyer or banker.
- Reader 4: Oh well, that’s true, (he replied in a patronizing manner).
- Reader 3: I was pretty irritated by his response, so I challenged the entire group: What percentage of your congregations really understand, believe and practice the conviction that they have been called to full-time Christian service by virtue of their Baptism?
- Reader 4: Oh, I suppose about ten percent.
- Readers 1 & 2: No way!
- Reader 2: Maybe between one and two percent!
- Reader 1: Probably less than one percent!
- Reader 3: If these 27 congregations are typical of the PCUSA, that means that 99 percent of the three million Presbyterians in this country don’t even know the meaning of their baptism.
- Reader 1: Why on earth would the good Lord want to increase our numbers? What great achievement would it be if we grow to have five million Presbyterians, 99 percent of whom didn’t understand the meaning of

their Baptism?

Reader 3: Here's the final blow: When I told this story to about 100 preachers at a seminary summer institute someone asked me where I got the idea that Baptism represented a call to full-time Christian service. In response I asked the group: How many of you teach your people Baptism represents an ordination to full-time Christian service?

About 15 of those 100 preachers raised their hands!

Reader 2: If the clergy don't believe in Baptism as the most basic ordination to the full-time service of God, how can lay members be expected to believe it?

Reader 4: Baptism was the only ordination Jesus ever had and it represented God's claim on his whole life! Neither Jesus nor the original twelve disciples, nor Paul were ordained clergy. But they were all called to full-time Christian service. So am I! So are you! Jesus calls all of us to be his disciples.

Reader 1: Look, right here in the Book of Order (holds up Book of Order)...

Reader 2: You always carry around the Book of Order?

Reader 1: Hey! It makes for some powerful reading. Listen to this: A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of His Church. Such involvement includes:

- proclaiming the Good News;
- taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church;
- praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church;
- supporting the work of the Church through the giving of money, time, and talent;
- participating in the governing responsibilities of the Church;

Reader 2: Here, let me see that.

- demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the Church;
- responding to God's activity in the world through service to others;
- living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life;
- working in the world for peace, justice, freedom and human fulfillment.

Reader 3: Hmmmm—it sounds to me that the Book of Order says in all this that Church members are called to full-time Christian service.

Reader 1: That's the way it sounds to me too.

Reader 4: I've been reading this book by William Diehl called Christianity and Real Life. He's written several books on that theme. The point he makes is that never once in his thirty plus years of work has his church offered him support or training in his on-the-job ministry, nor called for any accountability from him. He says, "I must conclude that my church really doesn't have the least interest in whether or how I minister in my daily work."

Reader 2: I guess a lot of people could make a similar statement. Martin Luther

spoke about the “priesthood of all believers.” But it seems that today ministry is seen as primarily the work of the clergy and the laity are valued for what they can do to help the pastor in, with and for the church rather than for living out discipleship in the work place, the home, and the community.

Reader 3: We no longer can ignore our own church members, because they’re the ones who are making ministry happen!

Reader 1: The Search Institute did a massive study of six major denominations including the Presbyterians. They were trying to find how well the denominations were doing at developing mature disciples.

Reader 4: What’s a mature disciple?

Reader 1: Well, there are about eight characteristics of a mature disciple. The one I like best says a mature disciple seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another. What it boils down to though is a person of mature faith experiences both a life transforming relationship to a loving God, and a consistent devotion to serving others.

Reader 2: I saw that same study. Do you remember the part that studied almost 2000 Presbyterians?

Reader 4: What’d they find?

Reader 2: Seventy percent never or rarely encouraged someone to believe in Jesus Christ. Forty-five percent never or rarely talk about the work of God in their lives. Almost seventy percent never marched, met, or gathered with others to promote social change. Sixty-four percent do not engage in daily prayer. Seventy-seven percent do not read the Bible when alone. And forty-seven percent never donated time to helping the poor, hungry, sick, or those unable to help themselves.

Reader 1: Wow! The Presbyterians have a way to go before developing mature disciples.

Reader 3: But why doesn’t the church take God’s call to its members seriously?

Reader 1: Some reasons are...

- the tendency to see Baptism as just inclusion into the church family and not an ordination to discipleship.
- clergy are overworked and have no time to nurture disciples.
- some church members don’t want to be accountable for their life and work in the world.
- and then some feel they don’t, they can’t make a difference—little old me, what difference can I make?

Reader 4: Sure, and some churches feel there’d be controversy if the problems of the world were brought into the church. That would disturb the tranquility of congregational life.

Reader 2: And, some churches are afraid of losing volunteers. That people will find their ministry in the world and the workplace and won’t be motivated to volunteer for church responsibilities.

- Reader 3: Let's not forget the "me" generation. Me and now—instead of "us" and the long-term future. Instant gratification does not make for ministry.
- Reader 1: And, let's face it, many churches are preoccupied with building up its own life and program and problems brought in from the outside world interfere with this preoccupation.
- Reader 4: But call is important, we know that. A recent book cites a national poll that concluded ninety-five percent of America's working population do not enjoy the work they do. It's just a way of keeping bread on the table. If we believe that God has a purpose for each person's life, think what a missionary challenge it is to help all these bored and unhappy people to discover their call!
- Reader 2: I think there's a connection in the fact that most of our institutions are in a state of decline; and that many of our people are unhappy and unfulfilled in their work; and that the church doesn't take seriously God's call to its members to ministry in daily life!
- Reader 3: Radical! But seriously, when top business executives were questioned regarding their faithfulness, the study revealed that one-third believed they were called by God to their present occupation. And these executives with a sense of call have a greater expectation of finding joy and meaning in their work. Almost three-quarters of them read the Bible regularly, and say daily prayers. Over half of them tithe. Sixty percent said that their religious training influenced ethical decision-making.
- Reader 4: I wonder how those executives knew they had been "called." We hear the word so much and yet I'll bet a lot of people don't know what call is or how to discern it.
- Reader 1: Well, let's see. One way might be that you believe that what you're doing all week long is something God wants done. God wouldn't call us to do something that God doesn't want to have done. Right?
- Reader 2: Right. Another point might be finding internal meaning and a sense of fulfillment in what one is doing. God wouldn't task us to spend our lives doing meaningless work.
- Reader 3: And it has to be work that uses our individual God-given gifts and talents. God wouldn't give us certain abilities and talents and not expect us to use them in meaningful work.
- Reader 4: And it's important that other people affirm that work and believe that an individual and his or her vocation are well-matched. People have to live and work in community and they have a right to expect support from others in the community.
- Reader 2: Support from friends is definitely important. And it doesn't take much effort either. A group can meet over breakfast for Bible study, prayer and sharing the joys and tribulations of their ministry. After all, faith is a personal matter, but not a private one.
- Reader 1: And it's important also to question oneself...check in to make sure we're still on track. Maybe keep a journal.

Reader 3:

Great suggestions. Like they say, "You only go around once in life!" But in that life we can fulfill what God has in mind in creating us if we:

All Together:

One! Discover our God given gifts and talents. Two! Discover where and how we can best develop and use those gifts in gratitude to God. Three! Surround ourselves with those people who will provide the support and the accountability we need to be faithful. Four! Expect to grow both in skill and in spirit to become a mature disciple of Jesus Christ.

Thank you and we hope you enjoyed our efforts.