

WHO DOES GOD CALL AND WHY?

Pastor Steve Ward

Ex: 3:11, 4:10-13 Moses

1Samuel 16: 4-12 David

Moses and David were unlikely candidates for leadership. Moses was born to a slave family. He started out in a **“basket” case**. He was drawn from the Nile River and raised as a prince, and taught that his step grandparent was a God. Murdered a man at the age of 40 and was exiled and lived 40 years in Midian as a shepherd. At the age of 80 God called him to go back to Egypt. Exodus 3:11 he asked God, **“Who am I?” “Why me?”**

Exodus 4-10 He said, “I am not eloquent, I am slow in speech and tongue. Please send someone else!

Now let’s look at David. God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a new king.

Jesse has 8 sons of which seven were brought before Samuel. And God says “no” each time.

God says in verse 7; do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the **Lord looks at the heart**.

Let’s ask some questions now. What should we look for in a leader: Someone with a **good appearance; tall; strong; a great education?** No God requires someone with a **heart and desire to serve God**.

I want to share with you how **God touched my heart** to do what he called me to do. I want to say **thank you** to this church for accepting me to be a part of this church family allowing me to be involved in the ministry of this church.

I know what it is like to start life with a dim hope of future success. My father had a **fourth grade education** and my mother **never went to school**. There were seven children in our family and **my older brother and I were the only two to graduate from high school**. My father owned a bar in Manitowoc. When I was four years old my brother Elmer who was a Navy vet taught me to swear like a mid-ship man. I can tell you that in a bar setting that’s cute. Fast forward to the first day of school where that same boy knocks all the coats on the floor in the coat room and the teacher tells him to pick them up. He tells her which part of his body to kiss and says I am going home! **Thank God that at that time age seven a Salvation Army officer** entered my father’s bar and saw me sitting there and asked my father if he could pick me up on Sunday and take me to church.

When I was a teenager **I gave my life to Christ at a youth rally**. At age 16 we moved to Green Bay. During this time I attended a Catholic Church with a close friend and was baptized a Roman Catholic. In **1962 I** graduated from Green Bay East High School and on the next Monday I was enrolled in **Molar Barber College** in Chicago. I barbed from 1962 to 1972. From 1966- 1968 I served in the Army and was a drill instructor. I also had bartender licenses in Milwaukee, Manitowoc and Green Bay. In **1968 I** met this beautiful woman and her name was Gail and I had no idea how much **my life was about to change**. We got married in 1969. Both of us wanted to have God in our lives so we went every Sunday to church. The problem was she was Methodist and I was Catholic. She would faint in Catholic Churches when they would use incense and I didn’t want to join a church where you could not drink or smoke. We started attending other churches. Do you know the difference between a **Methodist women and a terrorist?** You can negotiate with a terrorist. Gail is not a woman who compromises easily. For instance, I wanted two children and she wanted four and I compromised on three and she had twins. Gail also had what I call her secret weapon. We came to a point when she wanted something and I didn’t she would pull out her **secret weapon, I will just pray** about it. At this point I did not have a snowball chance in Hades. In 1974 we moved here to Appleton. The first Sunday we went to Immanuel UMC and thought it was nice. The next Sunday we came here. We took our two year old daughter Lori to the nursery and saw all the young couples with their children. We went to worship and didn’t notice an elderly woman who came and set down behind us. As soon as the service ended she welcomed us and invited us to go to coffee hour with her. We were greeted by many warm and friendly people and learned that the lady who sat behind us was **Jean Thomas, the pastor’s wife**. Now you have to understand that Gail was not dressed as a typical Appleton worshiper. We came from Milwaukee where she was a hairdresser at an up scaled beauty shop.

She had on a mini skirt and mid -calf red boots. This style had not quite made it to Appleton. Someone who became a great friend, Marilee Kuhn, asked another lady who became a great friend who does she think she is?

To say that First Church had a great effect on our spiritual growth would be an understatement. We found here a family of loving and caring people. In the short time we were in Kum Doubles. Cynthia Whitely and I led an early morning Bible Study. I taught third grade Sunday school and a senior high Bible study. I joined Methodist men and became president and District president. I ushered, served on the Education Committee and became the Education Chair. In **1979** I felt God was calling me to be a pastor. I told Gail and she confided in a Pastor who told her she need not worry,

that I would never be a pastor. Gail ended up getting an ulcer. In 1983 I enrolled in lay speaking classes and I spoke in many of the churches in our district. It was when I was preparing a service for Kaukauna Methodist church on September 3, 1989. The text was **Luke 14:25-33** the passage tells us that if you want to follow Christ we must be prepared **to give up everything to follow**. The night before I preached I heard God's call loud and clear. God and I had words. I told him that I couldn't be a pastor and I told him like Moses that I was not qualified. God said, just say "yes" and I will open the doors. That Sunday I told the people in the church that this was the hardest message I had ever worked on. I did not tell them why. That night while lying in bed Gail said to me, "you will never be happy until you do what God is calling you to do." I asked her if she remembered the last time I was called. You got an ulcer. She said she wasn't ready then but she was now. I asked her why now, and she said, "The time I was happiest was when I was serving God. So we prayed about it. The next day I went to church and saw Theda Andres, Mother Superior, Sunday School Superintendent, as I called her, Karen Cleary and Shelby Knezel, and they all said when are you going to be a pastor? In the meantime, we attended a **Lay Witness Renewal at Green Lake** and we made the commitment before communion to answer God's call. The **Holy Spirit was confirmed when R A Pigram** came up and told Steve to go for it. I hadn't told anyone. The Holy Spirit told R A that I was going to be a pastor. July 1, 1990, I sent a letter to Norm Stevenson and told him I wanted to go into ministry and become a pastor. I knew if God wanted me to do this he would open the doors. I never dreamed it would all happen so fast. The next week I got a call from our District Superintendent, Norm Stevenson asking me to meet with him in Green Bay. During that meeting he said he had a church where I could serve. It was a part time **appointment at Black Creek**. I told him I really wanted full time but I would pray about it and let him know on Monday. I found out that the church had turned down two qualified candidates so I felt **safe in interviewing**. We met and they said **yes**. Black Creek was close to many of my relatives and one cousin asked another cousin if he knew who was serving at the Black Creek Methodist Church?" He said, "No." She said it is your cousin Steve Ward. He said, "I guess the Methodist is finally scraping the bottom of the barrel. I served at Black Creek for ten months. At that time I got another call from the district superintendent and he mentioned he had a full time appointment available and would I come and talk with him. At that meeting he told me that Siren and Lewis were looking for a full time pastor. Now I had to go back and tell Gail. At this point you should understand that two years prior Gail and I had spent a weekend near Siren and Lewis and as we were leaving Gail commented that she could never live in that God forsaking land. When I went back to Gail her first question was how far is it from Appleton? My answer was how far can we go from Appleton and still be in the state, then I told her where it was and she cried for three days. Now she loves it there. When we came to Siren, **I still hadn't gone to seminary and so the process began with God leading the way**. By 1993 both churches **won church awards**. God is so awesome! In 1994 Pastor Dan Sweran, a pastor of Parthyville UMC and I led a workshop at Annual Conference on how to make small churches and were well attended. In 1995 I got a call from the producer of the show CBS This Morning. She said, "I had been nominated for best Protestant Pastor of the year in America." I told her it was quite a joke. She said it was no joke, in fact, I was a finalist. And they wanted to come out and tape our Sunday services. Gail and I and our organist Nancy, who nominated me flew to New York and appeared with a **Jewish Rabi and a Catholic Priest**. They did a one hour show on CBS. In my 38 years of preaching I can say that I have no way of telling you why our churches had grown, it had to be God! You see I still do not type, I am not computer savvy. I have a phone that is smarter than me, but I can tell you that God doesn't need our ability, he just needs our availability. He doesn't call the equipped, he equips those he calls. It costs a lot to say **yes** to God, but it costs a whole lot more to say **no**.

Let's look back at the lives of Moses and David. Their greatness was their **obedience to God**. All the **power, signs and wonders, their courage** found its root in **their humble and obedience faith in God**. Certainly human failing got in their way from time to time. But never did they lose their conviction that they were mere **servants to a higher power**. All they did they did cause God was working through them. As it was for them it is for us today. While we live in a culture that values independence and autonomy, **our faith** demands that we acknowledge the true source of all wisdom, power and achievement- God. The true meaning of stewardship is that we **managed wisely and well that which belongs to God**. Our ability for **success** in this world is ultimately measured by **how well we honor God, through the use of our minds, hearts, gifts and talents**. Little else matters. Moses and David knew this and they so ordered their lives that in the very end they in turn are honored, praised and remembered as **righteous** and mighty men. Thank God that our **history does not determine our destiny**. God is asking us as we enter 2019, "What's in your heart?"

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