

God-Breathed
Part 5: Called Out
August 9th, 2015

Welcome: All summer long, we're looking at places in Scripture that you submitted to us months ago. Places that are encouraging and strengthening and sustaining and ultimately shaping you to be more and more like Christ!

When we chose the text for this weekend, which we'll come around to in a moment, we had no idea that it would also be the weekend when I would be sharing for the first time the things God has been doing in our family!

We couldn't have selected a more fitting text!

If you're joining us for the first time...please know that these next few moments might feel somewhat like a family conversation...and though we don't do this often, it's important when significant change is occurring, to create space for that... My hope, if you're new to Harbor, is that you'll hear our heartbeat as a church and be drawn to what God is doing in and through this community!

If Harbor is your home church, you probably received a letter and personal video message from me on Friday. If so, you know by now that after several months of prayer and pursuing God's direction for our future, our family is in the midst of a life and ministry transition...a very good transition I assure you, but also very difficult.

So, I want to take a few moments to explain this to you before we get to our text... Ten years ago, when God opened the door for us to come to New England...our hearts were captivated by Harbor's commitment to *Help People Find Their Way Back to God*. For the last ten years, we have labored toward that end and it has been an absolute joy to witness the stories of ordinary people whose lives have been completely changed by the goodness and power of Jesus Christ. As I look out across this room...so many of you have encountered Jesus Christ in a very real, personal, life-changing way!

As a result, Harbor has grown in reach and influence and joy and health...and this, not because we have one or two dynamic leaders, but because we have a vibrant community of leaders and staff and volunteers whose hearts beat with a passion to **Help People Find Their Way Back to God**. And when a group of people gets excited about and commits their lives to the mission of Jesus, there is no limit to what God can do!

It has brought Beth and I deep joy to be part of this mission with you. Our prayer and desire has always been for God to be glorified in our family and ministry no matter where we are or what we do...

In the months leading up to this summer...God began to open some doors in life and ministry that we weren't anticipating. As we surrendered these opportunities to Christ

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and invited some very wise and trusted people to pray and process them with us...though I don't have space here to share the entire story...each time we tried to close the door of opportunity, it seemed that God held open the door and invited us through.

This happened over and over again until it began to settle into our hearts that God was possibly preparing us for a transition, which was hard to accept at first because we treasure this community and our role in it!

However, after months of seeking God's direction, Beth and I have decided to relocate to the Greater Omaha/Council Bluffs area where Beth's family lives and where we met and married over fifteen years ago!

So...it is with both a very real sadness, but also a real peace and growing expectation, that we will be moving from Harbor and I will be stepping down from my role as Lead Pastor by the middle of September.

Though we can't fully explain it...we believe God is in the middle of this, and we trust Him to take care of our family and to continue caring for Harbor just as He has done every step of the way for the last fifteen years!

There are many places in Scripture that help me process how God leads and directs us and one is Exodus chapter three! Though there are many things this passage can teach us, I simply want to encourage you with what I believe it shows us about God and how He graciously and persistently works out his good plans in our lives!

"One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. This is amazing, Moses said to himself. Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it." Exodus 3:1-3

Context: Now...if you don't know Moses' story...as a Hebrew infant, he was adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised in royalty and privilege, even though his own people were serving as slaves to the Egyptian Empire.

At the prime of his life, while being groomed for leadership, Moses saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew slave...and in the heat of the moment, killed him, which forced Moses into hiding where he spent the next forty years as a washed up shepherd separated from home and family!

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His life was a complete dead end! And it was here that God first spoke to Moses!

You see...God oftentimes does His best work even when we're at our worst?

Consider for a moment the ways that God has shown up in your life and the timing in which He's done it. Isn't it true, for many of us, that God has done some of his best work when our circumstances were at their worst?

A relationship was faltering.

Our family was fracturing.

Our health was failing.

Our career was fizzling.

Our hope was fading.

Maybe you got success or wealth, but you found it wasn't as fulfilling as you imagined. Or you got beauty or romance, but it didn't satisfy. Those things you hoped would fill you ultimately failed you.

And right in the midst of a dead end, God showed up!

Now, I don't know if God does this simply because He is good and gracious, or if it's because He specializes in bringing beauty out of ashes. Or if we're most receptive to Him when our strength is gone and our circumstances are faltering. Or if it's a combination of all three...

Regardless of why God often gives us his best during our worst, here's what I want you to see!

Whether your circumstances today are very, very good or very, very difficult, there is a God who cares enough for you to draw near to you and if, for just a moment, you will go to Him, you will see He is closer than you can imagine!

Now...here's the thing! Not only did God show up in Moses' life; He took this eighty year-old shepherd eligible for senior citizen discounts and retirement and breathed new meaning and purpose into his story! **Keep reading...**

"When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, Moses! Moses!' Here I am! Moses replied. Do not come any closer, the Lord warned. Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord told him, I have certainly seen the oppression

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of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. (10) Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.” Exodus 3:4-8a, 10

Now...if you're taking notes, I want to give you three ways to recognize and respond to God's leading in your life. Whether you're trying to make a wise decision around priorities or commitments, or you are seeking God's hand in your education, career or a relationship or for your family...whatever it might be! Here are three steps to take when trying to recognize and respond to God's direction!

#1 – Take Off Your Shoes

I'll give you two cultural examples to bring this home!

Egyptian Culture: When God instructed Moses to take off his shoes, this was a familiar custom practiced by religious priests in Egyptian temples. Today, in many Eastern countries, people take off their shoes before entering places of worship to acknowledge that they are personally unworthy of standing in the presence of a holy, infinite god.

By removing His shoes, Moses humbly confessed his unworthiness before God.

When it comes to recognizing God's presence and leading in your life, I would encourage you to begin by prayerfully and worshipfully acknowledging the vast gap between God's holiness and our sinfulness! His greatness and our finiteness. His sovereignty and our limitation! His strength and our weakness. His wisdom and our foolishness!

This allows us to replace the pride in our lives with a posture of humility. **The apostle James wrote...**

“God opposes the proud but favors the humble.” James 4:6

Pride keeps us from recognizing the hand of God, but when we draw near to worship God and acknowledge our need for Him, our hearts are softened!

Worship: It's one of the primary reasons we preface the teaching of Scripture with worship... Worship isn't like a warm up for the main attraction! Worship is the way we communicate our desire for God and prepare our hearts to listen and respond to Him!

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I'll give you on more cultural example, and this is more my own practical example than something you find directly in the text! In the west, we tend to remove our shoes only when we're in the privacy of our homes or if we're staying somewhere for a while.

For example, when you go to a friend's house for dinner, you take off your shoes...or at least you should!

By removing your shoes, you're saying, "I'm here to stay for a while..."

In the same way...taking off your shoes is a figurative way of saying, *"God, I'm here to meet with you! I understand that discerning your direction for my life is not a drive-thru affair, but a relationship where my heart is shaped more and more for you!"*

If Beth and I have learned anything over the past three or four months, it is that through all the struggling and praying and surrendering and seeking, God has given us a deeper passion to do His will! And this is where all our discerning must begin...

"God...our will is to know you and live for your glory!"

So...take off your shoes!

#2 – Wrestle Through Your Resistance

Although we don't have time to look at the whole text, if you read the rest of chapter three into chapter four, Moses gets into an argument with God! Have you ever been there?

5 times...Moses pretty much says 'NO' to God!

Why are you sending me? Who am I!

Who should I say sent me?

What if they won't believe me or listen?

I'm not good with words!

When those arguments don't work with God, Moses looks at him and says...

"Lord...please...send anyone else!" 4:13

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Moses was insecure, uncertain, afraid, filled with self-doubt, and simply unwilling to do what God asked! And somehow, in his mercy, God didn't blow Moses up, which should be encouraging!

Don't we do the same thing? When we begin to get a sense of God's direction for our lives, we come up with excuses for why we can't or shouldn't follow!

"God, what you're asking is too hard!"

"I'm not equipped!"

"It's uncomfortable. Inconvenient. Risky."

"God, I don't have the strength or resources."

"Why me...what about him or her?"

I've been very honest with you over the years about my feelings of being ill equipped for ministry, especially early on. When I started leading at Harbor, I was green and rough around the edges and there were times when I was ready to give up in the face of fear and insecurity!

One of the things that sustained and strengthened me and kept me in the game during those moments was the encouragement and prayer offered by close friends and leaders, many of them here at Harbor!

I believe that when you recognize the leading hand of God, but experience resistance in your desire to follow, you've got to bring people around who will help you struggle through your resistance!

Maybe there's a relationship you need to reconcile, but bitterness has made your heart resistant...

Maybe you're in a relationship you need to end, but you're afraid of being alone...

Maybe God is calling you to radical generosity, but your heart is stingy!

Maybe God is calling you to serve your wife and give your life for her beauty, but you're proud.

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Maybe God is calling you to move communities, to move into a certain neighborhood, to serve your neighbors, but you're too comfortable.

Maybe God is calling you to step up and serve with your time, but you don't feel ready or prepared.

The things God might call us to are unlimited in number, but so are our excuses...and if you're going to wrestle through your resistance, I think you need people in your life who will strengthen, encourage, and love you through the resistance!

Very few of us get burning bushes and audible words from God (if you have seen a burning bush, tell us about it, we'd love to share your story). Minus a burning bush, we need people with whom we can honestly share our fears, and who will encourage us to follow!

#3 – Go

Though we've been at Harbor for almost ten years, 13 years ago I was offered a job here for the first time. Long story short, after a week of praying over our decision, God made us move to St. Louis instead (I'm slightly joking, but not really)! I like the Mississippi River, but York Beach is slightly better.

I remember sitting in the basement of our house in Missouri just weeks into our move, throwing a book across the room because I was convinced we had made the wrong decision by not coming to New England.

In hindsight, I now see two things I didn't see then.

The first thing I didn't see was that the job I would have taken at Harbor dissolved in a matter of a year or so. Beth and I would have been jobless and homeless in New England with a one year old...which is fun!

The second thing I didn't see, which is of far more significance... is that by going to St. Louis we were able to know and invest in several people's lives who are now doing incredible things for the glory of God. One of my best friends came to Christ in his early twenties and after completing his masters degree in Engineering, went on to seminary, left his position at Boeing and planted a church in his hometown. One of my high school students traveled internationally with his wife to live in and serve low-income urban communities and is now in the PhD program at Boston College! Listen...when the kid

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you once confiscated Mountain Dew from on a cross-country trip goes on to get his PhD, it's both joyful and humbling.

Those are just two examples of how we saw God move when we followed Him, and I could give you many more.

I share this with you because you have no idea what God can do in and through your life until you trust Him and go!

Imagine what would have happened if Moses had won the argument with God (if that's possible). Would God have said, "*Ok, Moses, I'll get someone else?*" Someone would have gone down as one of the greatest leaders in all of history, but not Moses!

The Bible is packed with stories of ordinary, broken, flawed people who said 'yes' when God said 'go.' People who obeyed God and trusted Him with the results!

When most people are moving toward senior citizen homes and shuffleboard, God called Moses to put on his work boots and lead God's people on a forty-year field trip.

I don't care if you're eighteen or eighty years old, the God of Moses is still on the throne!

You have no idea what God can do in and through you when you say yes to Him!

I celebrate the countless stories of people at Harbor who have courageously said 'yes' to God, and through whom, God is doing remarkable things. Friends spending their vacation to care for people in third-world countries. Friends selling their homes in upper-class suburbs to move their families into low-income cities! Friends serving their neighbors generously and joyfully. Countless friends giving generously of their time and resources to help this church help people find their way back to God.

You have no idea what God can do when you say yes to Him!

Close

Please hear me, making this move for our family is hands down the most difficult, challenging move we've ever made. At the end of the day, I'll share with you the one thing that gave me the courage to say 'yes' when we sensed God nudging us in this direction...

This is the one thing that will give you the courage to say 'yes' to Him when you sense Him nudging you to follow Him!

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Gospel: In the midst of this decision, I was reminded that there is a God in Heaven who, in His great mercy, said 'yes' to me. When I was a sinful wreck, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, perfect, sinless, beautiful...to give His life for me. I knew that if God cared that much for me, that He would never ask our family to follow Him without promising to take care of us!

If Jesus Christ was willing to die for you, won't He also hold on to you as you follow Him!

Maybe you've never said 'yes' to Jesus. You're kicking the tires of Christianity, but you have yet to bow your knee to Jesus Christ as your Savior and King! Today can be that day... Go to Him and place your life in His hands!

If you're walking in Christ today, know for sure that Jesus will call you to follow Him in ways that exceed your strength, wisdom, or ability.

When this happens, the only way you'll go is if you see that Jesus Christ came for you! Then you'll trust Him...

Harbor, I love you...I always have! You bring us joy in more ways that we can count or express, and for that we're eternally grateful!

I'm going to pray and then some friends are going to join me on stage...because we want you to see that Harbor has never been about a single person or leader...it's about all of you and the incredible leaders behind the scenes who love and lead with great faithfulness and courage! These folks have stood prayerfully beside Beth and I as we've considered this move and I want you to see them and know them, because they are more committed than ever to saying 'yes' to what God wants to do in this community!

As a result, I am confident that Harbor will continue *Helping People Find Their Way Back to God!*