

Are You Called to Speak? Don't Run From Your Assignment

On a recent Sunday, I stood in a pulpit, looked out over a congregation of mostly strangers, cleared the lump in my throat and preached a message that the Lord had laid on my heart from the Bible.

Thousands of men and women speak publicly like this every week. It's what preachers do. But even though I speak often, I've found that preaching the gospel is one of the most frightening assignments anyone could attempt. I feel as if I die a thousand deaths right before I do it, and I die several more times after I go home and evaluate what happened.

After one discouraging experience in which an audience stared coldly at me with their arms folded, I determined that preaching surely must not be my calling. I shared my struggle with an older pastor.

"Sometimes I feel discouraged after I speak," I said. "Does that ever happen to you?" I was sure he would counsel me to stop preaching.

His answer shocked me. "Son, I feel that way every Monday morning."

When I tell friends that I stubbornly resisted the call of God to preach because of my lack of confidence, they act surprised. They think most people who stand in pulpits want to be there. Think again!

We assume God always chooses gifted orators. But true preaching is not a natural exercise, like any other form of public speaking. It is one of the most supernatural tasks

anyone can ever be called to do. It requires an imperfect human vessel to yield himself (or herself) to speak the very words of God.

If we deliver our message in our own human ability, the results will be miserable; but if we wholly trust the power of the Holy Spirit, prophetic preaching unleashes supernatural anointing.

Most preachers in the Bible were reluctant. Moses made excuses about stuttering. Gideon tried to disqualify himself, blabbering on and on about his weaknesses. Jeremiah complained about the responsibility of carrying a prophetic burden. And Jonah bought a one-way ticket to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea so he wouldn't have to give his unpopular sermon to the people of Nineveh.

As long as God has been anointing people to speak for Him, people have been running from their assignments—and giving God all kinds of creative excuses for their delinquency.

The apostle Paul, who was a silver-tongued Pharisee before he met Christ, was stripped of his eloquence before he preached the gospel throughout the Roman empire. He felt weak and totally incapable when he spoke.

He told the Corinthians: “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

Think about it: The premier apostle of the first century trembled as he spoke. Yet God used his words to spread the message of Jesus Christ throughout the known world.

Revivalist Arthur Katz, who died in 2007, wrote about the power of true preaching in his 1999 book *Apostolic Foundations*: “The only one qualified to preach ... is the one

who wants to run the other way, like Jonah. ... The man who sighs and groans when called upon to speak, who does not want to be there, who feels terribly uncomfortable ... is the man out of whose mouth the word of true preaching is most likely to come."

That is certainly not the way most of us view pulpit ministry today. We celebrate the smooth and the polished. We look for the cool, hipster delivery style. We measure the impact of a sermon not by whether hearts are slain by conviction but by how high the people jump when the preacher tells them what they want to hear.

That kind of carnal preaching may win the accolades of men, boost TV ratings and even build megachurches. But the kingdom is not built on smug self-confidence. We need God's words. The church will live in spiritual famine until broken, reluctant, weak and trembling preachers allow His holy fire to come out of their mouths.

If you have a message from God, stop making excuses. Run instead to heaven's altar, raise your hands in total surrender and let the Holy Spirit touch your mouth with a burning coal. Die to your fears, doubts and excuses, and let a holy anointing intensify within you until it becomes like fire shut up in your bones.