

MIKE SLAUGHTER

MADE FOR A
MIRACLE



From Your Ordinary
to God's *Extraordinary*



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YOU WERE MADE
FOR A MIRACLE



1

YOU WERE MADE FOR A MIRACLE

When Jesus called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

(Luke 9:1-2)

Can you remember when the call to follow Jesus became personal? A personal God calling comes in many different ways and at different life stages. For many, the calling is progressive, over a period of time or through a series of events. For the young teenager Mary, God's calling came through the messenger Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38). Maybe you are one of those who first began to personalize the call of Jesus through contagious messengers of God

in your teen years. Jesus' call in my own life occurred sometime between age seventeen and eighteen.

God's calling came to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:18-24). Our dreams are sometimes referred to as the "thin space" between the spiritual and physical. Haven't you ever had an important idea or answer to a question you've been pondering for a while that comes to you in the middle of the night? The nocturnal revelation is so important that you get out of bed and write it down so you won't forget the inspired thought by morning.

Saul, who would later become the apostle Paul, found his calling in the disruptive form of a blinding light. A disruptive crisis event will often awaken the longing for spiritual guidance and intervention. Because of crisis, church basements and fellowship halls become spaces for Twelve-Step groups and divorce recovery groups, as well as for financial planning groups that help people overcome the overwhelming burden of debt. Many of these folk would never have darkened the doors of a church building without experiencing a crisis and the overwhelming need for a power greater than themselves.

People in crisis not only feel a need for a greater power; they seek it in the company of others. Note that in our scripture, Jesus called the original Twelve "together." As we journey together in supportive community, we find in Jesus the power and authority to drive out our personal demons and to heal our diseases.

LIFE-ALTERING QUESTIONS

When the call of Jesus becomes personal, God is no longer just a nominal religious tradition or philosophical idea. This life-defining moment marks the GPS course for the rest of your life. By no means do you have all the answers, but you do begin to ask life-altering questions. Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" when

he was blinded on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:5). Saul wasn't the first to have asked this question or the first person who was uncertain about Jesus' identity. In Luke 9:7-9, after hearing news about Jesus' ministry, Herod is described as "perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life." Herod then said, in essence, "I beheaded John the Baptist myself. This can't be him. Who is this guy?"

My own conversion happened through a perfect storm—failing grades in high school, members of the band I was playing in arrested for illegal drug possession, and the looming possibility of being drafted for the Vietnam War. For the first time, I began to read the Bible that I had been given in third grade. And I am convinced that it was by divine guidance that I started with the four Gospels. Jesus seemed to jump right off of the pages. He was not the meek and mild, white and tamed, watered-down messiah that has been portrayed by many traditionalists in the Western church. Jesus was neither a conservative literalist who believed in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, nor a liberal progressive who denied the reality of the miraculous through supernatural intervention. I asked, along with Saul, "Who are you, Lord?"

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea from AD 26 to 36, was confronted with a life-altering point of decision when Jesus was brought to him by the Jewish authorities: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" (Matthew 27:22).

These questions, asked by Paul, Herod, and Pilate, are the most important questions we can ask in our lifetime. Don't make Pilate's mistake of trying to remain neutral about Jesus or make Jesus a problem for others to solve. Pilate listened to the voices of the crowd who called for Jesus' crucifixion rather than to the heart voice of his own conscience.

Jesus himself, in Luke 9:20, asked those following him this all-important question: “Who do you say I am?” Only Peter was quick to respond, “God’s Messiah.” Oftentimes people aren’t prepared to respond quite so promptly as Peter did. That’s to be expected. For many of us, conversion into a new life in Christ is an over-time process, not an instantaneous or spontaneous reaction.

How have you answered these questions? Or maybe a better way to ask is how are you still answering the question of Jesus’ call to follow? The answers can only be discovered in the act of following and not before. Don’t wait for definitive answers to these ultimate questions. Commit to being all in, follow Jesus fully, and begin to discover the answers in life’s miraculous outcomes!

THE MIRACLE OF TRANSFORMATION

Have you noticed that it was the nonreligious, ordinary, socially unacceptable, and religiously incorrect types whom Jesus chose to lead his movement? His twelve disciples alone are proof enough. Peter was an impulsive laborer in the fishing industry; Simon was a zealot, a first-century version of today’s alt-right movement; and Matthew collected taxes for the hated Roman occupiers. I never lose the awe and wonder that Jesus chose someone like me, who finished his junior year in high school with four Fs and a D-, to be a pastor. Or, that Jesus called someone to write books who had never read one! (Well, that may be a slight exaggeration.) Jesus was always calling ordinary women and men who would become, through the Spirit’s work of transformation, extraordinary!

At this moment, you may feel no sense of the extraordinary in your life, much less the miraculous. You might be stuck in a job you hate or even be unemployed. Perhaps you are dealing with the pain of loss through divorce, sickness, or the death of a loved one. Take heart! Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem reminds us that true

transformation and new life come through pain and even death: “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). The truly miraculous is experienced as we dare to journey with Jesus in the sacrificial way of the cross. “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). In this process of transformation, we die to self-interest and self-reliance and discover our true identity and life purpose in Christ.

Jesus gave his followers new names to represent their new identities. Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul. Almost two millennia earlier, the patriarch Jacob had a series of relational and business setbacks that led to emotional, restless nights of sleep. He had been, let’s say, less than upright in his relationships and business dealings, even cheating his own family members. However, Jacob’s all-night wrestling match with God ultimately transformed his character. God’s message came to Jacob when Jacob was willing to accept God’s true calling and purpose for his life: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” (Genesis 32:28).^{*} From that day forward, Jacob always walked with a slight limp, a reminder of his own daily need and dependence upon God. Jacob found life’s gains through his pain.

When you find yourself in a painful period of your life, or in a time when doubt and skepticism far exceed your faith, hang on and refuse to let go of God’s amazing grace and ultimate purpose for your life. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. All of us must remember that God “created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13). God reminds us,

^{*} The name Jacob can mean “holder of the heel” or “supplanter,” but it is also frequently translated as “cheat,” apropos considering Jacob’s successful efforts to cheat his brother Esau out of his inheritance.

as he did the prophet Jeremiah, “For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

A Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus under the cover of darkness, seeking wisdom about Jesus’ mission: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you were doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2). In answering Nicodemus, Jesus used the analogy of new birth to describe spiritual awakening: “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (John 3:3).

Human suffering and brokenness, caused by sin, resulted in us losing our identity as children of God and forgetting that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. The process of transformation in spiritual awakening allows us to see with new eyes both who we are in Christ and why we are here. Jesus is the fullest revelation of the person and character of God. But Jesus not only revealed God in the flesh, he also revealed what it means to be human. This is why Jesus often referred to himself as “the son of man.”

OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

You can tell a lot about where people find their identity and what they value by observing their T-shirts and tattoos. One winter evening at the end of the Christmas holidays, my wife, Carolyn, and I treated our daughter’s family to dinner at one of our favorite Mexican restaurants in the mountains of north Georgia. My son-in-law, Brendan, is from the Boston area and is ape-wild about the Red Sox. Right in the middle of finishing off the corn chips and salsa, he yelled across the room to a man sitting at a booth three tables away; “Hey, I love that T-shirt you’re wearing!” The man got up and walked over to our table . . . and you may have guessed what

happened next. Two avid Red Sox fans found each other in the Georgia mountains and entered into a discussion about the team's stats from the previous season.

When our son, Jonathan, turned twenty-one, he designed a tattoo showing a crown of thorns encircling the ancient Greek letters representing Jesus' name in the center. While visiting my daughter's family in Boston together, he and I visited a downtown tattoo studio and had the design inked on our shoulders, permanently reminding us who we are and why we are here.

We remind ourselves of our true identity when we remember and proclaim our baptism. Matthew tells us in his Gospel that when Jesus was baptized by his cousin John, a voice was heard from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). This is who we are! You are God's son. You are God's daughter. And with you God is well pleased. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever separate you from that love or status!

Now, if you are anything like me you may be having serious doubts about God's unconditional love. I am well aware of my own failures and shortcomings in living up to Jesus' radical call, "Follow me!" We need to remember, however, that immediately after Jesus' own baptism, the Spirit led him into the wilderness, where he faced incredible temptations. Three times the devil tempted Jesus to doubt his identity in God the Father by changing the absolute "This is my Son, whom I love" to "If you are the Son of God, then..." In other words, the devil said, "You can't be sure. Prove it!" But Jesus didn't have to prove what God the Father had proclaimed, and neither do we.

Don't listen to the voice saying that you're less than the person you are called to be—that you're not worthy, you have limited potential, you're not college material, you'll never be more than average. Don't confuse these whispers of darkness with the promises

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of God. As Jesus said, you are destined for a life of fruitfulness. You are highly valued. You have been made for greatness.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”

(John 15:16)

When you hear those tempting voices of darkness that question your identity, just say, “I am baptized—*kiss off!*”

Jacob, like Peter and Paul and countless others through the centuries, found his true identity and source of authority in God the Father. So did Loretta Ross-Gotta, a retired Presbyterian clergywoman who directs the Sanctuary Foundation for Prayer, a retreat center in Topeka, Kansas. She wrote in her work, *Letters from the Holy Ground*,

When we seek our authority in others, in wealth and possessions, in physical or intellectual prowess, instead of in God the Father, we will be continually defending and protecting this authority and threatening any who might question it. When our authority comes from God, we respect and value our power to bless and to curse. We do not use words carelessly. We make sober, wise judgments and take responsibility for the power to create and beget and parent that which has been entrusted to us.¹

It is in the daily denial of self-will—saying yes to God’s will—that we are empowered to become a healing source of God’s miracles in people’s lives around us. As Jesus promised,

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even

Every Miracle Has Two Parts

Popular author and pastor Mike Slaughter examines the two components of every miracle: divine action and human responsibility. For a real miracle to take place, we must act with God, using the abilities we have and directing them toward God's work in the world.

That great pastoral communicator, Mike Slaughter, shows the wonder of God using ordinary folks to do extraordinary work in the world. An empowering, hope-filled book.

—**Will Willimon**, author of *Who Lynched Willie Earle? Confronting Racism Through Preaching*; Professor of Christian Ministry, Duke University

Mike Slaughter is a phenomenal organizational leader who lives the principle of spiritual leadership. He believes in miracles, and through this resource you will be convinced that you are a miracle and miracles are still happening today.

—**Olu Brown**, Founding Leader of Impact Church, Atlanta; author of *Leadership Directions from Moses*

Faith is more than a divine idea and the miraculous life more than a wish and a prayer. Mike Slaughter reminds Jesus followers that God partners with us to create miracles. It's grit plus God that leads to the extraordinary—thanks for the challenge, Mike!

—**Rachel Billups**, co-author of *Down to Earth and Sent*; Executive Pastor of Discipleship, Ginghamburg Church

Miracles aren't magic. They are God's way of fulfilling God's best hopes for the world, with our help. Mike Slaughter, combining biblical wisdom, personal stories, and pastoral experience, invites us to participate in God's miraculous work.

—**James A. Harnish**, author of *Make a Difference* and *A Disciple's Path*

I love how Mike Slaughter, veteran pastor and world citizen, engages the reader through biblical accounts and contemporary stories. The way may not be easy. Grace can be costly and love demanding. But the reward is eternal.

—**Thomas G. Kemper**, General Secretary, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church



MIKE SLAUGHTER, Pastor Emeritus and Global Church Ambassador for Ginghamburg Church, is a catalyst for change in the worldwide church. Mike is the author of many books, including *The Passionate Church*, *Renegade Gospel*, *Dare to Dream*, *shiny gods*, *Christmas Is Not Your Birthday*, *Change the World*, *Spiritual Entrepreneurs*, *Real Followers*, and *Momentum for Life*. For more information visit www.mikeslaughter.com.

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