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Title: Nudge: Calls Requires Courage

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Scripture: [Nehemiah 1:3-6, Acts 1:8](#)

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Kate stepped out of the bookstore where we worked to a cold evening chill. She pulled her scarf up to her chin and hurried across the parking lot to her car. She had one stop to make, at the grocery, and then she would be home. It was so cold that in the short time that it took her to get from work to her car, that her fingers became so

cold they began to ache. She wished she had put on her gloves.

As she got going, she came to the grocery store, and on the side of the entrance to the store was a man out in the cold holding a sign that said HOMELESS PLEASE HELP. His collar was turned up as high as it could go, but her gaze rested on his bare hands. She thought about how cold her own bare hands had been. She thought about how cold his hands must be sitting there in the cold.

She went into the store. She began shopping for the things she needed. Eggs, bread, yogurt. One by one she checked off her mental list. Then there was a nudge, a nudge she couldn't explain. She hit one more aisle. She checked out, got back to her car, got in, and went to the exit where she came in. The man was still sitting there. She rolled down her window and he brought his bucket over. She didn't hand him any money, instead, she handed him the warmest pair of gloves she could find in that grocery store. A tear came down his eye and a tear came down hers. She realized it wasn't a lot, but it was something. So often, when thinking about those who are experiencing homelessness, Kate had found herself helpless. This night, she didn't feel helpless. It was a simple act; however, she couldn't help but think that the nudge she felt to go to one more aisle, God was using her in some way to care for one of God's children.

We are beginning a three-week worship series today called *Nudge: Finding and Following God's Call*. We will be looking at those nudges in our lives that get us moving in life towards God's call upon our lives. The Bible is full of

stories of how God has called people and we will be looking at the Old Testament book of Nehemiah as our guide.

Nehemiah is a book and a person in the Bible with whom you may not be familiar. The book itself is a memoir of Nehemiah's service to God. Previous to this period in history, Jerusalem had been ruled by a series of kings. Now, the sign "under new management" had been hung on the proverbial shingle of the region, as Jerusalem as in 6th century BCE, is now under the rule of the Persian empire after the Babylonian exile. Nehemiah is a cupbearer for the Persian king and is sent to the region as both a religious and political envoy. There were challenges in the region of Judah, most especially in Jerusalem. As Nehemiah arrives and understands what is going on in the region, he begins to feel the nudge to do something.

Long after Nehemiah's day. Jesus, in his last words following the resurrection and before ascending to heaven would commission his followers with this charge: *"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8 CEB)

Still today, the church recognizes this as Jesus commissioning his followers into the world. God calls us not away from the world, but into the world.

This is a call we see throughout the story of the Bible and one we see reflected in the life and experience of Nehemiah.

In a place that was in need, Nehemiah sees the need and then offers this to God: *"They told me, 'Those in the province who survived the captivity are in great trouble and shame! The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire!' When I heard this news, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said: 'Lord God of heaven, great and awesome God, you are the one who keeps covenant and is truly faithful to those who love you and keep your commandments. Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant.'" (Nehemiah 1:3-6a CEB)*

Nehemiah begins to pay attention to the nudge and to listen for the call of God upon his life. Through prayer, he is opening his life to the ways God will move.

The word call is most likely not a word you use regularly. We associate it with certain professions or certain religious ways of life. It's one of those words that can feel very "church-y"

However, it is a word that is essential to living the life that God desires each of us to live. It is essential for the world to be the way God desires it to be. It is essential to creating a church where the spirit of God is present and a church that is moving in people's lives and the community in real and meaningful ways.

A call also requires courage. Courage to hear and courage to respond.

I've come to believe that courage is a spiritual discipline. Think for a moment about all of the things that you have done in your life that required courage to do. It always requires courage to step out of comfort zones. And it takes practice to do so. I love what Brene Brown says about courage. "Courage is like-it's a habitus, a virtue, a habit: You get it by courageous acts. It's like you learn to swim by swimming. You learn courage by couraging." --Brene Brown

Calls require courage. So, what exactly is a call? It's from God, something that compels us to do something. It's when we feel that nudge that things should be a certain way and that we have a part to play in that work. All of us, each of us are called.

On occasion, a call means we might take our work in a certain direction, but a call is not a job.

A calling is not necessarily what we are good at, or in some cases, even what we enjoy doing.

And it is not necessarily a grand, life alternating event. Sometimes we associate the call with selling all of our possessions and moving somewhere remote. Typically, a calling is something we might be nudged by God to do at any given moment.

Nehemiah sees the distress in Jerusalem. He sees that those who have survived the captivity of the Babylonian empire are now vulnerable. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire. They need *something*. And along comes Nehemiah.

A call is God's way of inviting you and me into the tension of what currently is and what can be.

We just have to pay attention to the nudge from God that tells us we are called. The one called to help restore Jerusalem. Nehemiah is a cupbearer in the royal court by trade. It was the cupbearer's job to pour and serve the drinks at the royal table. That's right, the one who would help restore Jerusalem is a bartender.

We are all invited into that tension of what currently is and what can be. Each of us has the courage needed to step out of our comfort zones for God. We don't learn to feel the nudge of God towards God's calling on us by ignoring those nudges. Chances are, if you think God might be calling you to something, then God is calling you to something.

Your willingness to move forward in life, no matter what time it is for you, is in truth, a response to the call of God. It takes great courage to do so. There was a church drama troupe that decided to put on Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* the weekend before Christmas. The social hall was transformed into a theater. As the congregation gathered, they noted with amusement that Scrooge would be played by one of the kindest, most gracious, most un-scrooge-like men in the church. He was terrific though. He growled and grumbled his way through the part with great energy, shouting out every BAH HUMBUG with pointed nastiness! The final scene comes. Scrooge has been transformed as you recall and is now doing all he can to spread joy in the streets. Scrooge opens his bedroom window and calls out MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE! Then scrooge, looking for someone to help him spread gifts to the poor calls out to an imaginary boy, "Hey, you boy, you, there! Come up here boy. I've got something wonderful for you to do."

Then something amazing happened. When the transformed Scrooge called out "Come up here boy I've got something wonderful for you to do" a six-year-old boy in the audience seated with his mom and dad, got up and came onto the stage ready to do something wonderful. The actor playing Scrooge and the audience were both stunned. But then Scrooge, in a brilliant move said, "Yes. Yes, you were the one, the very one, I was calling." Then he gently led him back to his seat. When the curtain call came the loudest cheers were given to old Scrooge and the young boy who responded to a call for such a time as this.

A powerful line and a powerful truth; you are the very one that I am calling. May we each have the courage to respond. Let us pray.