



Near and Now

When I Doubt My Calling – John the Baptizer

By Frieda Mottonen

Warm-up Question

When have you doubted your ability to complete a task or fulfill a role?

This could be a new job, an assignment at school, or an adjustment to a life change.



Photo by Sylvain Mauroux on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? John the Baptizer

Read [Matthew 11:2-15](#)

Bible Story Reflection

The people of Israel have been waiting for generations for their Messiah to come, the one who will fulfill the law that they have been living by. In the midst of Jesus' ministry, there are still many questions about who that will be, including the question that John asks from prison: are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? John has been imprisoned, so is not able to witness first-hand the miracles being performed by Jesus. His disciples, instructed by Jesus, report back to him all that they have seen and heard. We are led to believe this answers John's question.

We are not left with just that, however, but we also get insight into Jesus' perspective on John's role as the messenger who has prepared the way, a direct quote from Malachi 3:1. This role that John plays in the gospel narrative has been foretold for hundreds of years. No pressure, right? Jesus expands the idea of John as just another prophet into *the* prophet that has been on the minds of so many. He also points out that this preparer of the way is not a royal prophet who has been privileged by the luxuries of wealth. John is a man of the wilderness. John is not who people might have expected. Yet, he is who has been chosen by God to be Jesus' messenger.

We get some insight into what roles we might fill, or might like to fill, in our lives. We can take inventory of our gifts and line them up to the needs we see in our broader communities. We can prepare ourselves to take on roles as we find vacancies. Oftentimes, however, we are *surprised* by the directions God's plan for our lives takes us in. God has much more in store for us than we can imagine being capable of, yet through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can accomplish incredible things.

It will not always be easy, nor will it be straight-forward. John ends up imprisoned and eventually killed for the role he plays. We can take courage in the fact that we are not alone on the journey, and that our role will be accompanied by many others who will work alongside us. Our vocations are not to be lived out in solitude. There will be days when it is harder to believe that you are up to the challenge that comes with your role. Know that those questions are not uncommon, even John had them. We can answer our calls *at the same time* as having questions about our purpose. You do not need to have it all figured out before you can begin; you're *already* doing it. Trust in God's plan for your life. Let anyone with ears listen!

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been surprised about a change in direction of your life's path? How did you handle that situation?
2. Think about how it would feel to have Jesus talk about you the way He talks about John in this passage. What would your reaction be like?
3. Do you think it was hard for people to believe that a person like John could be the one who the scriptures had been referring to? Why or why not?
4. How do you think John would tell his own story?
5. What is your current understanding of the role(s) you play in your life?
6. How do you see your role in connection with those around you? Are there areas of your life where you could use more support from others?

7. Who are your 'prepare the way' people who have gone before you to pave your path and who announce your awesomeness?
8. What can you do to reassure yourself when you doubt your ability to live up to your calling?
9. In what ways can you encourage others along their journeys of vocation?
10. How are you feeling called in a new way after reflecting on this story?

Activity Suggestions

Draw a representation of your life path so far. List the roles you have taken on or let go of at various points along that path.

Write a letter of encouragement to someone who has played a significant role in your life during a time of doubt or questioning. Tell them specifically the ways that they helped you understand and live into your calling.

Come up with a simple task that you can do with the things around you (filling a glass of water, making a sandwich, stacking objects, etc.) Give each person in your group a role to play that is necessary to the task. Work together to complete the task, then switch roles and do it again. Have one person/role sit out for a round and see if you can still accomplish the task. Reflect on the experience as a group afterwards.

Prayer Concerns

Those who feel unable to live out their calling, people experiencing doubt, the imprisoned

Closing Prayer

Your call does not always unfold like I expect, O God. Help me to trust in you and not lose heart. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

