

God Is Always Choosing People

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Much of the Bible is largely character development and transformation of persons and institutions. It usually begins with an experience of “election” or chosenness. There’s no getting started, it seems, without somehow knowing oneself as special and empowered. Then the character—of people and groups—will indeed and always develop. We cannot begin the journey on a negative or problem-solving note like “sin management.” It all begins with an experience of chosenness, just as in marriage and friendship.

Think of the many, many stories of God choosing people. There are Moses and Miriam, Abraham and Sarah; there is Deborah, David, Jeremiah, and Esther. There is Israel itself. Much later there’s Peter, Paul, and most especially, Mary. God is always choosing concrete people. First impressions aside, God is not primarily choosing them for a role or a task, although it might appear that way. God is really choosing them to be and to image *God* in this world.

God needs images. God needs people to be willing instruments. It’s essential, though, for God’s instruments to know that they are not alone, that they are not just doing their own thing, but rather are doing God’s thing. When God chooses someone in the Bible, the standard opening line is “Do not be afraid” (Genesis 15:1), and the final line usually includes the promise “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12).

Being chosen doesn’t mean that God likes one over another or finds some better than others. *Almost always*, in fact, those chosen are quite flawed or at least ordinary people. It is clear that their power is not their own. As Paul will put it, “If anyone wants to boast, they can only boast about the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

The paradox is that God’s chosenness is for the sake of communicating chosenness to everybody else! As in the Jonah story, this often takes people a long time to learn. Here is the principle: We can only transform people to the degree that we have been transformed. We can only lead others as far as we ourselves have gone. We have no ability to affirm or to communicate to another person that they are good or special until we know it strongly ourselves. Once we get our own “narcissistic fix,” as I call it, then we can stop worrying about being center stage. We then have plenty of time and energy to promote other people’s empowerment and specialness. Only beloved people can pass on belovedness.