



Near and Now

When My Calling is Behind the Scenes – Phoebe

By Vicar Paige McGrath

Warm-up Question

Is it more important to you to be remembered for who you are (your identity) or for what you have done (your vocation)? Or both? Neither? Why?



Photo by meriç tuna 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?

She Has Been a Benefactor of Many

Read [Romans 16:1-2](#)

Bible Story Reflection

In these short two verses, you hear Paul's commendation of his colleague, Phoebe. The book of Romans is a letter written "to all God's beloved in Rome" (Rom 1:7) by Paul, an early apostle. Scholars and Scripture have countless things to say about Paul, his writing, and his ministry, but *Phoebe* is only named in the Bible once. Phoebe seems like a prime example of when one's calling is behind the scenes.

Based solely on these two verses, a few things are apparent: Paul speaks very highly of Phoebe. He praises her in her role in the church she serves, and he asks that the recipients of the letter welcome Phoebe into their community. Based on this request, Phoebe was likely the one to deliver the letter Paul wrote, which means she was also likely the one to read the letter aloud to the recipients and the one to answer any questions they may have had about what Paul wrote.

However, Phoebe was more than a letter carrier and messenger; Paul describes her as a deacon, which comes from the Greek word, *diakonos*. *Diakonos* can also be translated as minister or preacher.¹ Phoebe had a prominent voice both in her church in Cenchreae *and* in the proclamation of Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul may have authored the letter, but Phoebe delivered it, physically and audibly. Phoebe was responsible for amplifying Paul's words.

By only having two verses in the Bible that speak to who Phoebe was or what her role was in proclaiming the Gospel, it is easy to see Phoebe as a behind-the-scenes character. Even being called a benefactor, Phoebe's legacy often gets reduced to "helper," but what if she is simply remembered that way because of the limited survived documentation or the way the church has historically quieted the voices of women leaders? As God's beloved of today, you are called to amplify the voices of those who have been quieted. You are called to praise good work when you see it. If you feel like your call is behind the scenes, may you be empowered to be the voice that helps many hear the Word of God, just as Phoebe's voice did. May you be a benefactor of many and recognized as such.

Discussion Questions

1. Is your call truly behind the scenes or are you simply under-recognized for the work you do?
2. How important to you is getting recognized for the work you do? Why?
3. How do you think Phoebe would describe her own vocation?
4. How do you think history would remember Phoebe if she had authored the book of Romans, rather than Paul?
5. Give an example of when someone spoke highly of you to others. What did that feel like? How did their words influence how others perceived you?
6. How have women's voices influenced your life and your faith?
7. When have you used your own voice to amplify another's voice?
8. Phoebe delivered someone else's message to a community, much like you are called to deliver Christ's message to others. In what ways do you deliver God's message to others, in word and deed?

¹ <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/diakonos>.

9. Who will tell your story after your work is done and your life on earth has ended? Who will tell others about who you were (identity) and what you did (vocation)?
10. What do you hope history (the Church, or even just your friends and family) will remember about you after you have died?

Activity Suggestions

Make a list of people who have amplified your voice or praised your work. Then, make a list of people who *you* would like to praise for their work or whose voices you feel called to amplify. Consider how you can do so.

Write a short story, fictional or factual. Swap your writing with another person in the group. Take turns proclaiming the short story of another author in the group. Allow the group to ask questions about each story, but the speaker must answer the questions, not the original author. For an extra challenge, include the themes of this study in your stories.

Play a game of Telephone. One person begins by whispering a simple message in another player's ear. Then, that player must repeat the message by whispering in the next player's ear. The game continues in this manner until all have heard the message. The final player to receive the message must proclaim the message aloud to the group to see if it remained the same as the original message. For an extra challenge, the message could be limited to sentences or phrases from the book of Romans.

Prayer Concerns

Deacons and preachers, mail carriers, and historians.

Closing Prayer

It is a privilege, O God, to support others with my time, talents, and treasures so that they can live into your call for their lives. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

