

Mildred Faye Polk – Answering The Call – Chosen

In Matthew 22 verse 14 Jesus ends the parable of the wedding feast by saying, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

The Bible uses the word calling many times in different contexts. This verse often refers to the call to ministry or discipleship. The interpretations are so many that I asked my pastor, Dr. Vance P. Ross of Central United Methodist Church, for his thoughts. "In this verse," he says, "following a troubling parable, Matthew finds Jesus making this perplexing statement. I read it this way: many are called generally. Few dare to embrace it. Every one gets God's call. Certain ones answered God's call."

Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin King, Ed Nixon, Rosa Parks, Fred Shuttlesworth, Diane Nash answered—as did many others. Most did not."

It is rare, I feel, when ministers will openly and clearly explain their calling. The woman we feature today has done just that and again left me impressed by the gifts and talents coming out of Yalobusha county. My loyal readers will recognize the last name Polk as that of not one but two prominent, highly respected families of Yalobusha. While working on a past article, Mildred mentioned her call to ministry and at my request, she is sharing her story. Enjoy!



Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. This article is part of a project to compile and share info about women in the county who have made an impact on the African American community. Her column appears bi-monthly, with occasional exceptions. She can be reached at (662) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net

By Dottie Chapman Reed

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The Ultimate Call

By Mildred Faye Polk

We have all heard our name called in one type of setting or another. We are called to dinner. We are called because someone wants to speak to us on the phone. We've been called because someone wants to get our attention, etc. We have many different calls that we can get in our lifetime. However, some of us have had to answer 'The Ultimate Call' on our lives. That call is from a higher power for us to do the impossible; and that is, "to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) That's the unexpected call that came to me, a nobody, from God Himself to take up the blood-stained banner for my Lord.

Who am I? My name is Mildred (Faye, my family's way of calling me) Polk. I was born to James and Genie Polk in Oakland, Mississippi, the 15th of 17 children. I lived in Oakland until I graduated from Walker High School in 1968. I attended Davidson High in Water Valley for 10 years when the powers that be sent us to Walker High because we lived between Oakland and Water Valley. I suppose they called it re-districting. I worked in the area for approximately ten months after graduation and then headed for Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I did not want to go but, due to family circumstances, I did not have much of a choice in the matter. I went to live with my oldest sister in Milwaukee. Although I did not want to leave home, I believe it was God's will that I take a leave from where I was raised. You see, I did not know another world existed different from the one where I grew up. It was only after I went to Milwaukee that my world view expanded, and I now thank the good Lord for that exposure. Hindsight is 20/20, they say.

When God speaks to you, you must listen. God began to speak more precisely to me when I was in my early to mid-thirties in Milwaukee. As my pastor would read his text to preach the word, I would find myself preaching a completely different sermon in my mind while in my seat. (Too bad no one heard them because they were good sermons!) My Pastor, though, openly told us that "God doesn't call women to the preaching ministry." It really wasn't a problem for me because I never wanted to be a preacher, so I thought nothing of it as it related to me becoming one. On the other hand, I never had a problem with female preachers either. I thought that if God can make a donkey talk, then He can do anything else He so chooses to do.

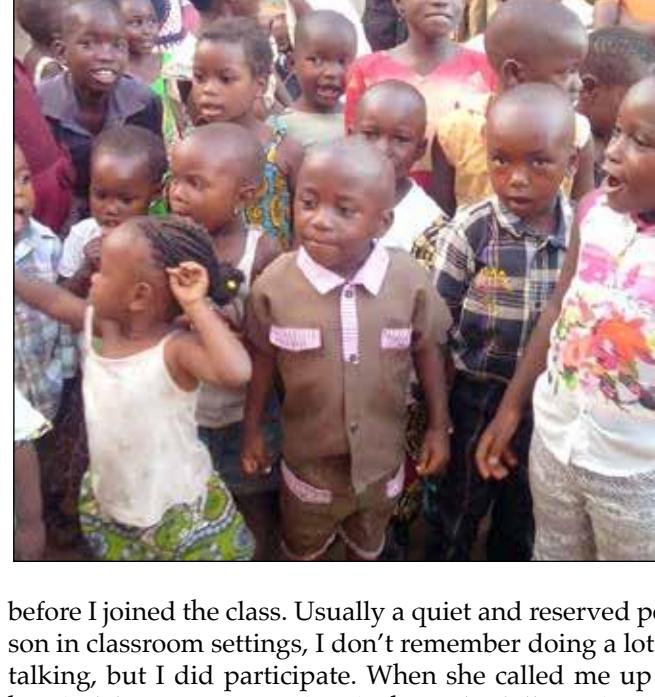
It was a Sunday morning, during worship service at Providence Baptist Church, that God spoke to me, not about preaching, but letting me know that He wanted me to do more than I had been doing as His servant. My pastor announced that any church that had been supporting American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee with at least \$5,000 a year could send a person, tuition free, to get a degree in Bible Theology. We had been doing that for many years by that time. His announcement troubled me so that I did not get much sleep until I spoke to the pastor about it. I expressed my desire to get the degree and told him if a younger person wanted to go, I would relinquish my interest. However, I thought I would be pretty sure to get the opportunity because not many 'Christians' want to go deeper in the study of God's word beyond their local Bible Study and Sunday School classes. Not me. Once I started feeding, I could never get my fill of the Word. I am always hungry for more. It all worked out.

Let's fast forward to the time after my graduation from American Baptist College, when God started to bug me again. He was speaking to me about preaching His word. However, I was not sharing this with anyone. Most of my fellow classmates at ABC assumed that I was already a minister since I was enrolled in a seminary. But after one of my instructors asked me point blank if I was a preacher, and I answered "No," God seemed to press me even more, anywhere, everywhere, any time of day and night until I just couldn't handle it anymore. I remained in Nashville after graduation, and one night following a church meeting, I cornered one of the female ministers and blurted out, "How did you know that the Lord had called you to preach?" She just laughed at me and said, "you'll know." But I still didn't know. A little while after that I probably did what I should have done in the beginning. I prayed to the Lord. I basically said, "God if this is what you want me to do, then you have to show me something so that I can know for sure."

It was in December of that same year, 2006, a few months after I uttered that prayer, that God sent me the answer by way of a total stranger, suggesting that God truly does work in mysterious ways. The first week of December I attended a three-day class at the Sunday School Publishing Board Conference in Nashville. After the last class, as the instructor and students were packing up and saying our goodbyes, the unthinkable happened. Our instructor was a lady from Nebraska whom I had never met



Mildred Polk (above) preaches from the podium at Hillside Church in Uganda. She has made two trips to the country to share the gospel with the young (below) and old.



before I joined the class. Usually a quiet and reserved person in classroom settings, I don't remember doing a lot of talking, but I did participate. When she called me up to her desk by name, I wondered why. I playfully said something like, "Yes ma'am. What may I do for you?"

I was expecting the usual, "Are you a preacher?" as so many others had wondered. Before this moment, my answer was always, "No – and don't talk to me about becoming one."

But the instructor asked me something different.

"Have you accepted your call to preach?"

Shocked and surprised, I laughed and told her, "No! I'm running."

Her reply is etched in my memory forever. "You may as well do it because it is all over you."

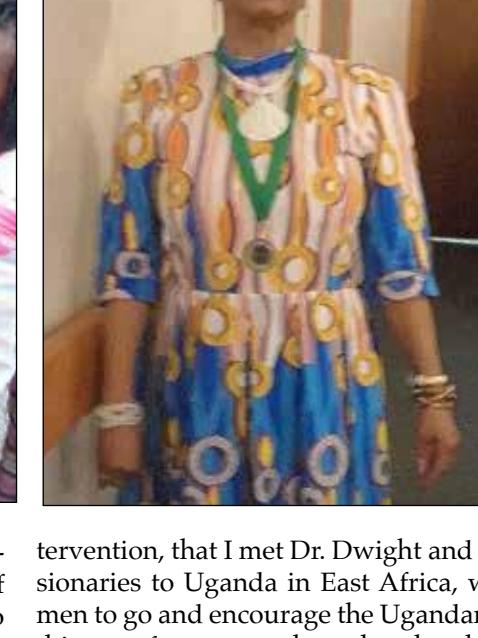
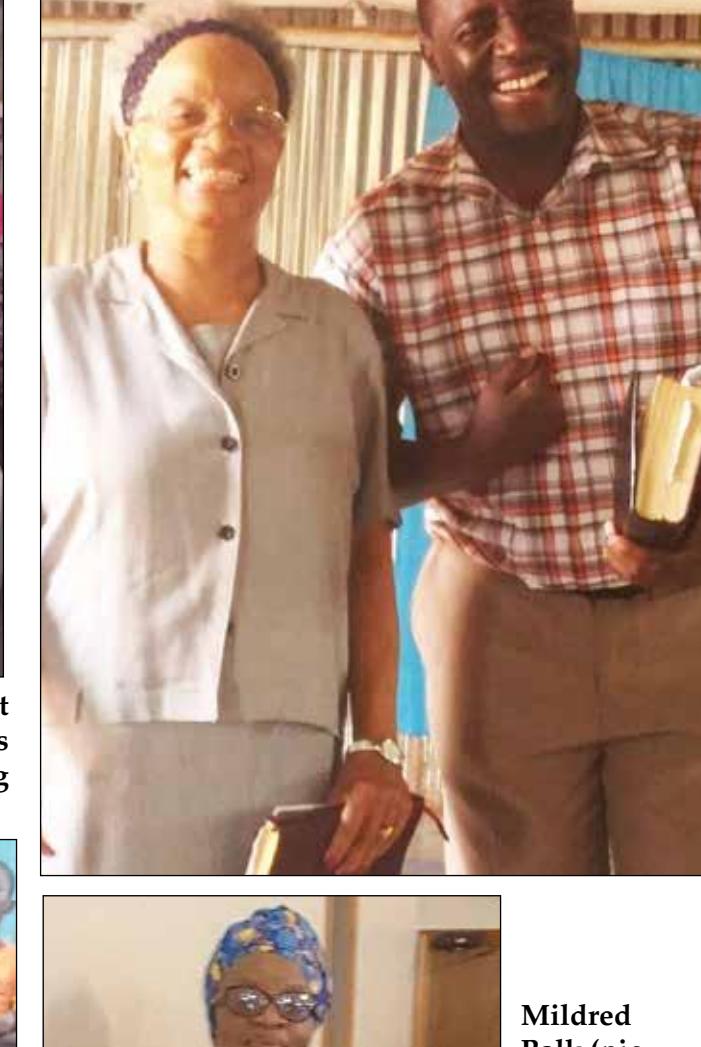
God had sent the answer to my prayer, and I stopped running and totally committed to His plan for my life: to preach the gospel!

When you accept God's will for you, it feels like the weight of the world has been lifted from your shoulders. You become at peace with that thing you did not want. If He calls you to it, then, He will equip you to do it. I had to trust that God knew better than I what I could do and, to whom He wanted to endow His gifts. Thus, I accepted His call and haven't looked back. And I'm so happy and elated that I did.

God is so, so amazing! After I accepted my call, I could see and do things that were not even on my bucket list because of Him. A few months after accepting my call, God allowed me to join pastors with the National Baptist Convention USA for an eight-week mission trip to the U.S. Virgin Islands. This was in a teaching capacity, not preaching, but it was an opportunity of a lifetime granted to me, His humble servant.

I moved back to Mississippi –Southaven – in 2011 after having spent five years in Nashville. The very next year I was afforded a trip to the Holy Land of Israel with my church, New Hope Baptist. For that I wish to thank my family, friends and church members. And that's not all. A few years later I had the chance to fulfill one of my own bucket-list items, which was a true blessing from God and a dream come true.

It was in the year of our Lord 2016, and by divine in-



Mildred Polk (pictured above) with Pastor Godfrey Tinka at the Hillside Church and wears an outfit (left) made by an Ugandan seamstress.

tervention, that I met Dr. Dwight and Solome Quinn, missionaries to Uganda in East Africa, who were recruiting men to go and encourage the Ugandan pastors. We found this out after we got there that they had been looking for men to work with the Africans, who were facing many challenges in spreading the gospel. The trip ended up being four females plus the Quinns who made the trip. Thank God that I was one of them. Never in my wildest dream would I ever think I would be preaching and teaching on the soil of any African country. I have been blessed to have two opportunities to minister in Uganda, returning in 2018. God works all things out for the good of those who love and trust Him with their whole heart, soul and mind.

"In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thess. 5:18). This scripture my mother taught me when I was nine or ten years old and it's still one of my favorites. Thank you, mom. I thank God for all the many, wonderful blessings He has allowed me to see, to do and have. Blessings!

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Mildred currently serves as one of the associate ministers at New Hope Baptist Church in Southaven with a congregation of approximately 400. She is responsible for

outreach, which includes serving communion, visiting nursing homes and working with missionaries.

Her goal moving forward is to be a full-time missionary locally, in the field or over-

seas. She would like to be a consummate missionary. We wish you God speed!

Reflecting on Mildred's life, I am reminded of my Aunt Mary Hester Pritchard's signature song

that went like this:
Time oh time, Time is winding up.

Destruction in the land, God's gon move his hand.

Time oh time, Time is winding up.