

Elizabeth Laing Thompson

When God Says *go*



Rising to challenge and change
without losing your *confidence*,
your *courage*, or your *cool*

Praise for *When God Says "Go"*

"Few books have stilled my soul and shifted my faith perspective like *When God Says 'Go'*. Elizabeth's vast knowledge of scripture, her invitation to explore the stories of biblical men and women, and her encouragement to saturate ourselves in truth rather than circumstance is powerfully transformative. If you're looking for a deep dive into the reminder that God is always with you, *When God Says 'Go'* will be your new favorite resource and study guide."

—Bekah Jane Pogue, author of *Choosing REAL*,
national speaker, writing & speaking coach,
Encouraging Soul Care at bekahpogue.com

"Elizabeth Laing Thompson holds your hand, dismisses your excuses, gives you fuel for the race, and empowers you to take that first walk on the waves in *When God Says 'Go'*. Be inspired by her authentic, friendly voice and her biblical arsenal. You're not alone. She has stood where you stand, and she jumped. This book of faith will help you jump too."

—Andy Lee, author of *A Mary Like Me: Flawed Yet Called* and
*The Book of Ruth Key Word Bible Study:
A 31-Day Journey to Hope and Promise*

"*When God Says 'Go'* offered poignant and heartfelt reminders about our unique opportunities to serve God and how to peacefully trust His ways. Elizabeth's beautifully told stories reignited my heart and commitment for going all in for Jesus. Whether it requires a huge transformation or a 'yes' right where we are, giving God our all is truly the best way to live. This book will challenge you, convict you, make you chuckle, and leave you wiping tears before you close the last page."

—Courtney Westlake, author of *A Different Beautiful*

“If you are hesitant about what God has called you to do, *When God Says ‘Go’* is a must-read book that will transform your fear into courage. Elizabeth Laing Thompson breaks down biblical examples of scripture in a way that will leave you wanting to read more. This book will encourage you to boldly answer God’s call on your life with confidence and expectation—to courageously say yes when God says go.”

—Caroline Harries, author of *In Due Time*, blogger

“*When God Says ‘Go’* gives us the gentle nudge and the affirmed push to step into who God is calling us to be. Elizabeth explains that road may not always be easy, but neither has it been easy for anyone God has drawn into a meaningful calling. I’m so grateful for Elizabeth’s words, for the way she both encourages us to be bold and nourishes our hearts with her writing. I highly recommend this book for any woman looking down the individually incredible path God has set for each of us.”

—Emily Ley, author of *A Simplified Life*

“Elizabeth is an absolute marvel. She writes in a style that is witty, relatable, and downright fun to read. In *When God Says ‘Go,’* Elizabeth bridges time and helps us connect with biblical characters from long ago. They become contemporary friends instead of ancient acquaintances. We feel as if we are right there with them as they wrestle with feelings of fear, unease, and confusion while listening to God’s call of, *Go!* This book is a must-read for anyone not quite certain of how to proceed when God calls us forward. Isn’t that all of us? As Elizabeth says, ‘God is calling us all to go somewhere new in our walk with Him.’ I am so relieved that Elizabeth helps and encourages us to rise to the challenge. She is our trusty trail-guide whose wisdom we are all fortunate to heed.”

—Sarah Philpott, author of *Loved Baby: 31 Devotions Helping You Grieve and Cherish Your Child after Pregnancy Loss*

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Dedication

For my courageous in-laws, Bill and Glenda Thompson, who have never said no when God said go. How grateful I am that He finally said, “Go live two miles away from Kevin and Elizabeth.”

Acknowledgments

An author’s name stands alone on the front of a book, but the truth is, a book is a team effort.

I am still awed that God is letting me do this writing thing. After so many years working and waiting, so many years thinking He was saying no, I’m still getting used to Him saying, “Go.” Every morning I wake up and think, *Really, Lord? You want me to write for You today?* How I love doing this for Him—and with Him. I am deeply thankful for the astounding privilege.

Now for the people. . .First (always) my husband, Kevin. He didn’t know he was signing on to be a writer spouse when we said, “I do” (in my defense, I didn’t know either), but he has generously and joyfully embraced the role; in fact, he should give Awesome Writer Husband lessons. Last year when I said, “Hey, remember that time we had two babies in fourteen months? Can we do that again. . .only this time with books?”—he didn’t blink, just said, “Who needs sleep anyway?” He kept our family running and kept me sane. When I got home from writing marathons, he nodded and smiled at my hyper-caffeinated, near-manic babblings and pretended they made sense, and (perhaps best of all) he had the kitchen clean and the dishwasher running. I’m forever-and-always thankful that God lets me go through life at your side.

Thank you to Cassidy, Blake, Avery, and Sawyer for the snuggle hugs, the snort laughs, and the silly games. Being your mom is my favorite thing.

This book would not exist without my in-laws, Bill and Glenda

Thompson. Not only has their inspiring example taught me how to follow God wherever He leads, but they also stepped in to help our crazy life keep running full-steam-ahead while I wrote. They chauffeured, they invited my kids to the Thompson Restaurant, they pulled piano lesson duty—for all this (and so much more), thank you.

I am grateful to my parents and siblings and siblings-in-law for their constant encouragement and faithful prayers. I have watched my parents go for God their entire lives—their courage, constancy, and perseverance have taught me (and many others) what it means to follow God at every stage of life. My effervescent mother asked for daily updates and responded with breathless enthusiasm every time, as only a mother would care to do. My sister Alexandra provided approximately 5,000 confidence boosts when insecurity struck—thank you for always wearing rose-colored glasses with me.

My sister-in-law Talia was a life-saver in the final weeks of writing. She took time away from her own intense graduate work and mom life to help me research. She read the sections that most intimidated me to write, and her insights made them better. She is not only brilliant, but also humble, generous, and kind.

My brother-in-law Byron made the book trailer—he has the gift of finding the soul of a project and capturing it on screen.

I'd be lost without my writing partner, Emma—*parabatai*, first reader, forever friend. She read the whole book several times through and performed her usual (and yet oh-so-unusual-because-she-is-oh-so-gifted) magic. As Jonathan did for David at Horesh, she helped me find strength in God (1 Samuel 23:16).

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with my many questions. Kelly McIntosh is ever gracious, with an email-return speed that is almost supernatural. The marketing team is creative, persistent, and positive. Shalyn Sattler makes the challenge of marketing feel like an adventure, not a burden. Liesl Davenport sweetly pretends my dumb questions aren't dumb, and she always goes the extra mile. Lauren Schneider did a beautiful job copyediting, knowing where to correct and where to let me blur the lines between adjectives and adverbs. Many thanks to Ashley Schrock for another wonderful book cover—it's perfect! Thank you to Mary Burns, marketing guru; Faith Nordine, proof-reading ninja; and Morgan Dreher, typesetter extraordinaire.

Thank you to all the friends and family who so generously allowed me to share your stories in this book. I am humbled and honored that you entrusted precious pieces of your life to me so that others might be encouraged and inspired.

Thank you to my church for praying with and for me as I wrote. Thank you for looking past my ball caps and crazy eyes at midweek. It is a joy to serve God and our city together.

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This book was fueled by caffeine brewed by the amazing baristas at my Starbucks (thank you for letting me hog the window seat), and by musical inspiration from The Tenors, George Winston, and Pentatonix.

And to all of you who read this book, thank you. You are on my heart and in my prayers, and I treasure every email and letter you send my way. I pray these words help you find—and embrace—God's call wherever it leads.

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Introduction

When God Says “Go”

*G*o: the smallest of words, the biggest of meanings. It may be one of God’s favorite words.

Sometimes life is calm. Secure. Peaceful. Nothing scary, each day much like the one before. That’s usually when God shows up. That’s usually when God says, “Go.”

Sometimes God calls dramatically, in miracle and flame. Sometimes He calls subtly, in stillness and whisper, so soft we won’t hear if we aren’t listening. Sometimes through His Word, sometimes through a friend, sometimes through life events.

However He speaks, God calls to us all. We are called for different roles, in different ways, at different points in our lives: one season holds one purpose, the next holds another. We are God’s people, His instruments, and He wants to use us. As Romans 8:28 puts it, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” *According to His purpose.* God has plans for each of us. He has work for us to do, work He prepared a long time ago, work He has equipped us to accomplish: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

God is calling. . . . Will we answer His call?

When God's Call Scares You to Death

Moses' Story

Based on Exodus 3–4

So now go. I am sending *you* to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.”

Moses gapes at the fiery bush, reeling. He shrinks from the light, recoils from the heat, resists the words.

Go.

You.

Egypt.

Go to Egypt, the land of Moses' childhood, the land he fled forty years earlier—and for good reason. Go to Pharaoh, the king who would gladly remove Moses' head from his body without thinking twice.

Moses bows low, tries to find respectful words to speak back to the God in the bush. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?”

“I will be with you. . . .”

As the voice goes on, Moses sits back on his heels. He wants to say, “I have no doubt You are more than qualified to confront Pharaoh—but me? Why *me*? Are You sure You have called the right man?”

Forty years ago, maybe young Moses would have risked a return trip to Egypt, even embraced the challenge—bold Moses, confident Moses, defender-of-the-Hebrews Moses. Unmarried Moses, childless Moses, adoptive-son-of-the-princess Moses, who could afford the luxury of courage. Moses who once was brave enough to

challenge an Egyptian overseer.

Maybe this flaming God has missed the last four decades Moses has spent away from Egypt, hiding in Midian: safe years, happy years—raising kids, tending sheep. Moses tries to picture leading the sheep home this evening, telling his wife, Zipporah, “So I spoke to a fire in a bush in the woods today—turns out the bush was actually God—or maybe it was the fire that was God, not the bush—anyway, God is sending me back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and set all his slaves free! I could get killed, but—well, the fire in the bush said I should do it.” If he weren’t so terrified, it might be almost funny.

But the fire God is waiting for an answer. Moses swallows his objections and plays along, stalling for time. “So, uh, suppose I go to Egypt—which god do I say You are? The Egyptians have never heard of You—a thousand apologies, I mean no offense.”

“I AM WHO I AM.”

As God explains, orange flames flickering in time to His words, Moses tries to listen, but he can hardly hear past the thundering of his own heart, the objections clamoring for attention.

When God finishes speaking, Moses turns on his logical voice, the one he uses with his children when they get irrational. He has to help this God acknowledge the weakness in the plan—namely, Moses.

“I’m just a nobody Hebrew—an outcast. Maybe there was a time they might have heard me out, but not anymore. What if they don’t believe me?”

The bush glows brighter, hotter. “What is that in your hand?”

“A staff.”

“Throw it on the ground.”

Feeling a little foolish, Moses throws the staff down in front of the bush. The instant the wood hits dirt, it begins to writhe. Moses blinks hard, not trusting his eyes. The staff softens and coils, snakelike—no, wait—it *is* a snake! Golden and glistening in the firelight, its beady yellow eyes fixed on Moses. And now it’s

rushing toward him, charging.

With a yell, Moses runs, bare feet scrabbling on rocky soil. He trips, falls back onto his elbows, crab-walks backward as fast as he can scramble. The snake follows, slower now, pink tongue flickering, staring Moses down with those hard yellow eyes.

The voice in the bush rumbles—is it *laughing*?—and commands, “Reach out your hand and take the snake by the tail.”

The snake has frozen in place at the sound of the voice. Head raised, tongue fluttering, eyes unblinking.

Moses leaps to his feet.

“What are you waiting for?” booms the voice. “Pick up the snake!”

So this is it. Moses has asked too many questions. Shown too much fear. The fire God is going to smite him right here: death by snakebite. At least death will come swiftly—a few hours’ agony at most.

Moses reaches a shaking hand toward the snake. It holds still, watching him, as if preparing to strike.

Breathing good-bye to his wife, Moses moves fast. He clamps his fist around the smooth, twitching flesh. Squeezes his eyes shut, waiting for the bite, the burn.

Nothing happens.

He slits one eye open. Shouts in surprise, loses his grip. His staff clatters to the ground. His *staff*. The snake has become a staff again. Slowly Moses bends to pick it up, trembling all over, half laughing with relief.

“That—that was a good trick,” he tells the bush. “You got me.”

“It is no trick,” says the bush. “It will prove to Pharaoh that I am with you.”

The voice shows him another marvel, covering Moses’ hand in leprosy, healing it again—and at the end of it, Moses’ skin is fine, but his head is pounding. He just wants to go home. Home to Zipporah and the family. Home where staffs remain staffs, hands remain leprosy-free, and heads remain firmly attached to bodies.

Perhaps he needs to make his objections more detailed. “Pardon Your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent. I am slow of speech and tongue.” As if to prove his point, Moses’ tongue hitches, and he stutters. “These miracles are astounding. But I can’t do them justice.”

Angry flames roar, stretching high as treetops. Moses cringes away from the billowing heat. Presses tentative fingertips to his face to see if his eyebrows are singed.

The voice growls, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

Moses buries his face in his hands, exhausted. This voice, this God, is relentless. Moses can’t hint or hedge anymore; he will just have to say it. “Pardon Your servant, Lord—I am honored by Your request, Your faith in me—but please. Please send someone else.”

Flames surge; heat washes over him in a wave. He tries to run but there’s nowhere to go.



Poor Moses. He thought he had left Egypt and danger behind forty years ago. Gone was the bold young man, the cocky prince of Egypt who thought he could save people. Make a difference.

No, Moses knew better now. Life had taught him different. His place was here now: here in Midian, far from Egypt; here with his wife, their family, his sheep. It wasn’t a thrilling life, but it was safe. Comfortable. Predictable.

And then a fiery bush starts talking. And this is no idle chatter—weather predictions, sheep-shearing strategies—no, the bush has plans. *I AM* has plans.

“So now go. I am sending you.”

Back to Egypt, to danger, to an unpredictable life with dizzying purpose.

When God Changes Your Plans

I am thirty-three, and life has never been better. Happy marriage, three crazy kids, fixer-upper house in a great neighborhood. My parents and in-laws both live nearby (translation: endless supply of free babysitting), I have finally found close friends, we love our church. After eight years, this town has become home. I'm ready to mark out a burial plot in the woods behind our house, because I never want even my bones to leave this place. A few months later, God says, "Move."

I'm like, "Excuse me? You didn't—You don't mean *me*?"

And He says, "Go sell your house, leave your extended family, and move. Go to a city where you've never lived and know not one single soul, and start a new church with your husband, your kids, and a handful of strangers."

I fill our boxes with tears.



I'm sitting in a history class in college, listening to this girl laugh in one breath about drinking beer out of her rugby boot then rant in the next breath about how she's fed up with hypocrisy in Christianity. I'm insecure, reserved; she's intimidating, outspoken. But as class ends the Holy Spirit whispers, "Give." The girl sprints out of class. I shoulder my bag and sprint after her, waving an invitation to a Bible study.



I'm stuck. I've been stuck for a while. People hurt me—worse, they hurt people I love—and I retreated. Built an invisible box around my heart and locked myself inside where it's safe. There is no risk-taking inside this box. No conflict, no potential for disappointment or betrayal. For months, years, I ignore the knock at the door. I keep my box clean, love and serve Jesus as hard as I can from inside these walls, my fortress. But the knocking is becoming louder. Insistent. Deafening. I press my ear against the

door, already knowing what I will hear. God's voice, kind but firm, speaks gentle through the keyhole: "Grow." With shaking hands and wounded heart, I fumble for the key.

God Is Always Calling

Our God is always calling His people to go: to move, to give, to grow. Moses, Abigail, Mary, Jeremiah. . . God called them all to fulfill His purposes, just as He calls us today. Our Bible heroes responded much as we do: with a jumbled-up inner storm of excitement and fear, insecurity and hope. Like us, they faced doubt, regret, weakness. Their stories and struggles can help us face our own.

The question isn't *Is God calling?*, because God is always calling. Always urging us onward, giving us purpose, encouraging us to grow. The question is *Will we answer His call?*

Maybe it's time to go. Go somewhere new, someplace we've never been. A geographical place, a spiritual place, a relational place. Maybe it's time to move forward after being stuck with one foot in the past. Or time to go deeper—in Bible study or intimacy. Time to go higher—in prayer or in dreams.

Maybe it's time to give: to use talents and opportunities God has given.

Or maybe it's time to grow, right where we are: to dig into the Word, dive into our heart, and become the person God is calling us to be.

When God says, "Go," we face a choice. Will we swallow hard and step up, saying, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)? Or will we sit back and stay safe, stammering, "But Lord. . .?"

Whether we're ready or not, God is calling us all to go somewhere new in our walk with Him. So what are we waiting for? Let's answer His call. Let's go for it.

Let's Go Deeper . . .

For Further Study

Read about Moses' early adult life in Exodus 2:11–25. What signs of courage and leadership do you see, and why do you think Moses lost these traits?

Journal Prompt

1. What specific challenges and changes are you facing right now?
2. What are you most afraid of as you face those challenges?
3. Which call feels the most relevant to your life right now: *move* (move somewhere new, redirect your life in some way), *give* (give more to God or to people), or *grow* (face a weakness, develop a new strength)?

Prayer Prompt

*The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid? . . .*

I remain confident of this:

*I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.*

Wait for the LORD;

*be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.*

PSALM 27:1, 13–14