By sun and wind, by rain and snows,
In tree and men, good timber grows

Where thickest stand the forest grows
We find the patriarchs of both
And they hold converse with the stars,
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife
This is the common law of life 34

Discover this. Go out anew into the experiences of life. I assure you that you will meet your Spain, in the sense that you will never get there. You might get to your Rome as a prisoner, not as a free man. But if you have the power and the dynamics of a human will, nothing in all this world can stop you. Why? Because you refuse to be stopped. You have the dogged determination to exist and the courage to be. Let us pray.

Oh God, our gracious, heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the creative insights in the universe. We thank Thee for the lives of great saints and prophets in the past, who have revealed to us that we can stand up amid the problems and difficulties and trials of life and not give in. We thank Thee for our foreparents, who have given us something in the midst of the darkness of exploitation and oppression to keep going. And grant that we will go on with the proper faith and the proper determination of will, so that we will be able to make a creative contribution to this world and in our lives. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray Amen. [Invitation omitted] 35

At MLKCC ET-61

34 Cf. Douglas Malloch, “Good Timber” in Be the Best of Whatever You Are (Chicago: Scott Dowd, 1926), p. 31

35 For an example of King’s invitation to baptism, see final paragraph of “Man’s Sin and God’s Grace (1954–1960), p. 391 in this volume.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

My Call to the Ministry

7 August 1959

[Montgomery, Ala.]

Joan Thatcher, publicity director of the American Baptist Convention, asked King to compose this statement. In her request, Thatcher noted, “Apparently many of our young people still feel that unless they see a burning bush or a blinding light on the road to Damascus, they haven’t been called.”

1 Thatcher to King, 30 July 1959. Maude Ballou enclosed this statement in a 7 August 1959 reply to Thatcher. Thatcher’s letter indicated that King’s message was to be included in a leaflet for the January 1960 observance of Life Service Sunday.
My call to the ministry was neither dramatic nor spectacular. It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it did not come as a sudden realization. Rather, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the ministry. At first I planned to be a physician, then I turned my attention in the direction of law. But as I passed through the preparation stages of these two professions, I still felt within that undying urge to serve God and humanity through the ministry. During my senior year in college I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry. I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become. A few months after preaching my first sermon I entered theological seminary. This, in brief, is an account of my call and pilgrimage to the ministry.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

THD MLKP-MBU Box 21

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2 King preached his trial sermon at Ebenezer in the fall of 1947 and was ordained in February 1948. He graduated from Morehouse College in May of that year and entered Crozer Theological Seminary the following September.

"Divine and Human Mutuality"
"Man's Helplessness Without God"

[9 August 1959]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

King offers two possible titles for this handwritten sermon outline. He criticizes those who rely too much on their own power, as well as those who 'wait on God to do everything' and believe they 'don’t need to do anything about the race problem'.

I Introduction—One of the things that has characterized human life through the centuries has been man persistent attempt to remove evil from the face of the earth. Very seldom has man, collectively or individually, thoroughly adjusted himself to evil. In spite of all of his rationalizations, compromises, and alibis, man knows that the ‘is’ is not the ought and the actual is not the possible. Though he often treasure in his heart the evils of sensuality, selfishness and cruelty, something within him reminds him that they are intruders. Even and again man in his deepest attachment to evil is reminded of a higher destiny and

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1 A 9 August 1959 Dexter program indicates that King preached the sermon "Man’s Helplessness Without God".