

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CALLED?

OVERVIEW: In the faith community, people often allude to a sense of calling that guides their lives. (“I feel called to music ministry” or “I don’t feel called to work in the nursery.”) But what does it really mean to be called? How can we identify our calling—and how can misconceptions about calling keep us from understanding God’s will for our lives?

This discussion explores three foundational principles of calling:

1. We are called to GOD’s PRESENCE
2. We are called to a LIFE of DISCIPLESHIP
3. We are called to be SENT

WATCH:

As a group watch one (or all if time allows,) of the movie clips below. How is being “called” portrayed? How does this portrayal differ from how you’ve experienced calling in your own life?

The Voice from Heaven: This is the quintessential stereotype of calling... A heavenly voice interrupts daily life with instructions to follow.

“If You Build It He Will Come” from Field of Dreams (2:38)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ay5GqJwHF8>

Invitation to a Life-Changing Adventure: Following God is an adventure, but sometimes it plays out in quieter ways than the movies portray. God’s calling flows through every stage and season of life—even unseen, humble ones.

“You Will Not be the Same” from The Hobbit (1:45)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZipIm3ZPmrk>

An Unshakable Conviction: Main character Jerry Maguire has an epiphany that the way he’s conducted business as a sports agent is all wrong. In response, he writes a “manifesto” transforming his business model and strikes out on his own. While God occasionally gives his followers “wake up calls”, His purpose and plans for our lives often unfold gradually over time.

“Who’s Coming with Me?” from Jerry Maguire <http://www.movieclips.com/videos/jerry-maguire-official-clip-whos-coming-with-me-409455683621?autoplay=true>

DISCUSS:

In each of these clips, calling is expressed as a dramatic awakening or as an invitation that comes from outside the individual. Yet, Scripture paints a different picture—a picture of a personal call God extends to all of His followers, to join His broader mission in the world.

1. We are called to GOD'S PRESENCE

“In the Bible, calling is repeatedly described in terms of God’s faithful and enduring presence. God is present and available to humanity and He continually calls us to *return* to His presence and *be present* with Him...

God’s call is represented by various ‘calling’ words throughout the biblical text. ‘Return to me’ is the refrain of the Old Testament prophets. The Psalms repeatedly call us to ‘come into God’s presence.’ *Dwell* and *abide* are also favorites of the Psalmists. Jesus used words like, *repent, come, follow, love, and abide*. **Calling words tend to be directional, all drawing the responder to God...**

Calling words are usually accompanied by *presence words*. *Presence words* tend to be positional, describing our relational position to God – *in, with, one with, indwelling, at hand, and at the right hand* are a few. *Presence words* describes the mysterious yet extremely close position of God in our life.” New City Commonsⁱ

John 15:4-11

- As you read these verses from John 15, note the various ways Christ emphasized the importance of connecting to or “abiding” with Him.
- Before God ever calls us to a specific role or task, he calls us to Himself. How does this perspective shape the way you look at your work and life?
- How can it guide us when we don’t have clarity regarding a specific calling in our lives?

We are not called to do something or go somewhere; we are called to *Someone*.
We are not called first to special work but to God. The key to answering the call is to be devoted to no one and to nothing above God himself.”
- Os Guinnessⁱⁱ

2. We are called to DISCIPLESHIP

In the New Testament, the meaning of vocation or calling (*klesis*) pertains to the gospel—an invitation to salvation and all the blessings that go with it:

Acts 2:28 – Called to repentance and faith
1 Cor 1:9 – Called to fellowship with Christ

1 Pet 2:9 – Called out of darkness and into light
1 Pet 1:15; 1 Cor 1:2 – Called to be holy
Rom 1:7 – Called to be saints

“We are not being asked to choose from a variety of callings, to find ‘which’ one is right for us. Rather, one call goes out to all—the call of discipleship. For it is incumbent upon all Christians to follow Christ, and in doing so, to become the kind of people God wants us to be. **The call of the gospel is not to a particular occupation, but to sainthood.**”

- Lee Hardyⁱⁱⁱ

- Think practically, how could this knowledge shape your daily life?
- How does it guide the decisions you make in your professional life?

As an expression of discipleship, we are called to the CHURCH

The New Testament Church is called *Ekklesia* – a Greek word meaning “assembly” or “called out ones” (See I Cor. 1:9, Eph. 1:1-4, Col. 3:15).

While Jesus’ call is personal, it’s not purely individual. Jesus summons his disciples to a community of faith, the Church.

3. We are CALLED TO BE SENT

John 17: 1-26 - Take 5 minutes to read this passage and note phrases that reference calling, abiding/connecting with God, or sending.

- What do these verses tell us about the connection between our relationship with God and our relationship to His mission?

CALLING can’t be separated from *SENDING*: As we respond to God’s call, we live in his presence, and are sent into the world to be a conduit of God’s presence for others. “God calls all of humanity to return to His presence and be completely present to Him. As we respond to that call, he sends us into the world to imitate Him by being present and available to others in the same way. As such, God’s faithful presence to each of us becomes our model for an incarnational public faith.” New City Commons^{iv}

As we live out our calling, we are SENT TO THE WORLD.

Col 6:15 -

“All the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbors’ benefit.”

- John Calvin^v

“For as God bestows any ability or gift on us, he binds us to such as have need of us and as we are able to help...God has knit us together...and let us in the world on the condition that every one of us should consider wherein he may be able to help such as have need of him.”

– John Calvin^{vi}

- Coloradoans are known as independent, self-reliant people who value personal freedom over cultural institutions such as the church. How does God’s call challenge us to live differently than the culture we live in?
- SO WHAT? Take a moment to review the principles presented in this discussion. What difference will they make in your life? How do they inform:
 - Your understanding of God’s call on your life?
 - The role your work and relationships play in God’s bigger plan?

ⁱ New City Commons Foundation. *Faith 360*, “Faith and Work”.

ⁱⁱ Guinness, Os. *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hardy, Lee. *The Fabric of This World*.

^{iv} New City Commons Foundation. *Faith 360*, “Faith and Work”.

^v Calvin, John. *Institutes*, III, vii 5.

^{vi} Calvin, John. *Sermons of M. John Calvin on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*.