

Understanding Calling

Pete: On the very night I was saved I had a dream. In the dream I was standing in no man's land between two fighting armies. I was standing with my arms open wide in the shape of a cross and I was shouting out 'No, Stop', with my head looking heavenwards. What did this mean? It seemed to indicate that something of my calling was to do with prayer in the context of international crisis. 12 years later the Lord led Pip and I into a prayer focus regarding international crisis situations. God had put something into my spirit within the first hours of being saved that became a central factor of our lives years before it occurred.

Pip: I became a Christian after attending a huge rally in London that drew 10,000's believers from all over the country. The event was organised by a Christian lobby group making a stand against the moral climate of the nation. There was strong opposition to the rally by protest groups with people throwing smoke bombs into the crowd. That evening, after walking from Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park, we listened to an evangelist who had walked around the world carrying a cross challenging us with a powerful gospel message. On my return home I knelt by my bedside and asked Jesus to be Lord of my life. As I look back to my spiritual birth and to God's leading in my life I see that two seeds had been sown in my heart at the point of my conversion. One was to do with advocacy and the second was to do with world mission. I pursued a career in teaching before the Lord dramatically changed my direction leading me to join the beginnings of a world mission organisation where I met Pete; and later into a ministry involving advocacy and intercession in a global context.

The point we want to make from our testimonies is that God is preparing you now for a future you may not yet understand. However, He might have already given you a glimpse of it. Take some time to reflect on this for your own life and write those thoughts down.

A similar thing happened to the first two disciples of Jesus.

Matthew 4:19

'Jesus said to them 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'

From Jesus's words we can see that their first calling was to follow him and their second calling was to be fishers of men. If you don't prioritise the first you will not understand the second. This point is further outlined in Jesus's words about the greatest commandments.

Matthew 22:37-39

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

1. Love God with all your heart and all your soul. This is about God's exclusive one to one relationship with you.
2. Love your neighbour as yourself. This relates to how your life affects others.

In this study we will look at discovering and following the second commandment of Matthew 22. This could also be referred to as understanding your calling.

Your Calling

2 Timothy 1:9

'God...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.'

Points we can draw from this verse

- If you are saved you have a calling.
- The calling is holy; in other words it is not of your own self-determination.
- Your calling is established according to God's own purpose.
- It comes to you by grace not according to your own merit or natural ability.
- It was decided for you before time began.

In my experience, all the above were true. I was more interested in farming or being a forester and I had no thoughts about international matters so it must have been God speaking to me. Secondly I had no idea how to start, what to do or how to do it. Yet over time God equipped me with supernatural sight and ability just as he will do for you as you get to know and follow your calling. The following verses explain more on this subject.

Ephesians 2:10

'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them'

2 Peter 1:10

'Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'

Romans 8:28

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose'

What we can say from the last verse is that if you live your life doing your own thing without reference to God, then things will not work out. As we see from the above verses, you are not just an accident of time looking for something to do. God has a very real direction for your life if you choose to follow him.

How do you understand God's 'calling' or direction for your life?

The key step is to present all of yourself to God wanting his will for your life and not your own. This next verse outlines this.

Romans 12:1-2

'I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God'

Points we can draw from this verse

- When God has your body he has everything in it.
- When he has your body he can renew your mind.
- Then you will know the calling of God upon your life.

The first step is to present all of yourself to God and to choose his will for your life and not your own.

How will God speak to me so that it is clear?

First, keep doing what you are doing, and as you grow in faith, God will direct you. God can choose to speak to you in various ways. It may be a dream as it was for me; it may be seeds that were sown at the time of your spiritual birth as it was for Pip; it may be direct words into your mind and it may be directly from reading the bible. Or it may be that over time he develops a desire within you to do something that you did not have before. It may be that God confirms in your heart that what you are presently doing is exactly what is in his heart for you and he increases peace and faith and vision in you for the task. What is certain though is that you do not have to worry; God knows the best way to get through to you. Just trust him. Develop your relationship with him and ask him about it through prayer. He will reveal it to you at the right time. The next verse confirms that he will work in you to make his purpose for you clear.

Philippians 2:13

'...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.'

Developing God's calling

Once you begin to understand God's direction for your life then you need to know how to develop it. This following verse helps us here.

1 Corinthians 9:24-26

'Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ...'

Points we can draw from this verse

- Focus your life around your calling.
- Develop faith in the context of your calling since all development is by faith.
- Do not run with uncertainty. Give time to understanding.

Once you have understood and started to follow the direction God has given you then stay with it. This next verse outlines this.

2 Corinthians 10:13 - *'We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us'*

- Don't move into areas or spheres of activity God has not called you to.
- Understand the boundaries and don't stray into other areas of ministry without clear guidance.

Further considerations that might be helpful

- Growing in your calling will involve training and testing. Take some time to read through the life of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37 and chapters 39-47. See how God tested, prepared and trained Joseph from receiving his initial dream to the fulfilment of his dream and how he then functioned in his calling in Egypt.
- Not all callings are dramatic. For example, being a parent is an important and difficult calling.
- Not all callings are public in their outworking.
- Share what the Lord is saying with mature believers in your life who know you and who are wise in the ways of the Lord. The Lord will often confirm his ways through our spiritual family.

Final thoughts

It is clear that because you are saved God has a plan and purpose - a calling for the rest of your life. It is not about looking for something to do. Continue to do what you were doing before you were saved, unless it is clearly something that is not acceptable to God. Grow in your faith and relationship with God. He will speak and direct you. Trust him.

Our earthly calling will come to an end. But then something more amazing begins. We look at this in the next session which is titled Glorification.

Suggested Further Study

Fulfilling Your Calling