

Fulfilling your calling

The Foundations study titled, 'Understanding Calling' made clear that you are not just an accident of time and that you need to find something to do to create your own significance. God has a very real direction for your life as the following verse explains.

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.'

The following points were drawn from that 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.

This study outlines further aspects of the journey in fulfilling your calling.

Staying the Course

Your first call is to God – he has called you into relationship with him and it is out of this personal relationship that he will direct you into his world. Whether you work in the public or private sector; whether you are at home or at school; employed or self-employed or not employed, staying the course as a believer will be a battle because you are carrying the presence of Jesus through your life into a world that on the whole rejects him. Through faith we have become citizens of heaven, yet in a spiritual sense we are living in enemy occupied territory here on this earth. Our task is to bring the light of God's kingdom into the darkness. It is a battle and the enemy holds no punches in his resistance to this happening. In the following verse, God declares his calling upon his people who were living in a society and a culture that had aligned itself to spiritual darkness:-

Micah 6:8

'He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you. But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God'

God gave guidance to his people Israel through the prophet Isaiah. The next verses are relevant for us today, whatever the profession or work God has given you to do.

Isaiah 56:1-2 *'Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the one who does this, the person who holds it fast...'*

The nature of opposition you will experience in following God's call on your life will vary according to the strength of the enemy's power in the location and context where you live and work. For example, the oppression and danger believers face in nations hostile to Christianity is fierce, while those in other societies may face opposition in more subtle ways;

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but whatever the nature of opposition, all believers experience the same battles which is firstly, not to compromise their call and secondly, not to give up.

Faith under fire

Hebrews 11 gives a list of those who are sometimes described as the ‘champions of faith.’ At first glance these champions seem to be in the list because they were superheroes in faith and did astounding things or won great victories; but were they?

When you look into the lives of those mentioned you will certainly see a mixed bag of individuals who all had deep flaws and who failed many times. What is it that got these individuals into the ‘champions of faith’ list? Let’s take a look at some of those mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11.

Noah had quite a lapse after exiting the ark in an incident of drunkenness in **Genesis 9**. **Abraham** lies about Sarah being his half-sister. **Sarah** doesn’t believe God’s word to her that she will have a son. She laughs at God in unbelief (**Genesis 18**). Abraham takes matters into his own hands and through his relationship with Hagar, sets off a bloody historic battle that continues to dominate the world scene today. **Jacob and Esau** represent a dysfunctional family full with deceit and betrayal. **Moses** goes on the run after committing murder. He searches for all sorts of reasons as to why he can’t do what God asks of him and he becomes a bit of a complainer. **Gideon** struggled with doubt. **Samson**’s story is littered with moral failure. **Jephthah** is so impulsive he sacrifices his daughter because his theology is off the wall. King **David** becomes corrupt and commits murder in his lust of another man’s wife. **Elijah** has great mood shifts as he goes from one almighty miracle to running away from his arch-enemy Jezebel.

All these biblical characters are described as champions of faith, but not because they were great examples of morality or because they never doubted or moaned against God. They are not there because they didn’t get angry with God or because they didn’t try to hide from him or want to give up. They are not there because they had their theology all sorted out and never had failures in judgment. They are certainly not there because they were great examples of sinless performance and respectable members of society. They are not there because they never experienced suffering or valleys of despair. They are there just because they kept believing! They kept going. They didn’t understand what was going to happen next. They didn’t know how God was going to provide. They didn’t have explanations for everything. They had enough revelation from God to believe, and so do you.

Despite all the struggles and difficulties and obstacles that came their way they believed God and he honoured their persistent, struggling faith. God worked through them in their day by day and step by step faith to conquer kingdoms and raise the dead to life. They saw the fulfilment of his promises and they saw the defeat of their enemies. Their faith under fire brought them through persecution and suffering; and in **Hebrews 11:39** it tells us that each one obtained a good testimony of faith.

Hebrews 12:1 begins...

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'Therefore we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.'

The writer is telling us that these biblical characters were just like us. They were farmers, sheep-herders, soldiers, politicians, boat builders, judges, prophets. They were fathers and mothers, uncles and brothers, husbands and wives. They were also God's people and so they had God's calling on their lives and despite failures and difficulties; they kept believing. Those who did see their sin turned from it and kept going. God not only honoured them and great things were achieved through them but they, like Moses, saw into the future as '*they looked to the reward*' (**Hebrews 11:26**). They did what Jesus did in his moment of greatest difficulty; he saw the future and '*for the joy set before him endured the cross.*' (**Hebrews 12:2**)

As you follow the call of God in your life you will have difficult times. We live by faith on an invisible and sometimes visible battlefield and your calling makes you an enemy target. Yet take encouragement in the example of those who made the list of **Hebrews 11**; they were just like us and all they did was to just keep believing.

James 5:17

'Elijah was a human being, even as we are.' (NIV)

Remaining in faith is all God needs to lead you through to a place where you see his promises fulfilled and where, at the end, you will also receive the joy of your reward.

Some further points.

1. Before God gives you your own vision to follow, he may well first train you through serving the vision of another. For example, in the gospels the disciples learnt first by following Jesus. When Jesus left the earth, it seems they received their own individual calling from God to different geographical locations or different people groups.
2. There may well be times of waiting between different seasons of God's calling in your life. These times are just as important and just as much a part of God's plan as the active seasons of your life. God will work through these waiting times firstly, to draw you more closely to himself and secondly, to work in you to prepare you for the next season of activity.
3. Do not fall into the trap of envying someone else's calling. If you do this you are devaluing the calling God has given you. Every calling God gives is significant to him; your calling is significant to him.
4. Jesus said of himself that he could only do what he saw the Father doing and do it in like manner.

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John 5:19

'Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner'.

This is important to understand. Not only does God have a plan for what he wants you to do but he also a plan for how he wants you to do it. Give time to understand the strategy for the vision or calling he is developing in you.

5. When Jesus made the statement that '*the gates of hell will not prevail*' against his church, he was outlining a strategy of attack to win the battle not a strategy of defence. It is the enemy who is on the defence as 'gates' are often the last place of defence not attack. This is important to remember as you walk through your calling.

Matthew 16:18 *'And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.'*