

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

EXPLORING THE CALL

*Practical Wisdom for Discerning God's
Call and Purpose for Your Life*



Exploring the Call: Practical Wisdom for Discerning God's Call and Purpose for Your Life

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Foreword

The call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Whether I hear God's call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude.

— Oswald Chambers

What is the meaning of life? Why am I here? What am I called to do with my life? We have all asked ourselves these questions at one point or another. These are real questions that people have been asking since the beginning of time.

The search for the meaning of life is common to what it means to be a human being. In fact, the search for the meaning of life is one of the things that led to my becoming a Christian at the age of nineteen. I had a strong sense of calling to do something with my life, but I didn't know what that was. I found the answers in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:16 reminds us, "For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him" (MSG).

At the very heart of what it means to be a Christian is to be "called." Jesus said, "For many are invited, but few

are chosen” (Matt. 22:14, NIV). But what does that mean to be called? *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it best: “calling (*n.*): a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by conviction of divine influence.”¹ More specifically, Os Guinness reminds us, “The truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”² We are all called with the one calling to follow Christ, but each of us is also called in different ways, at different times, to do different things with our lives. No two callings are the same.

One way that I like to explain the word “call” is by using it synonymously with the word “vocation,” which helps break down the secular-sacred divide. The word “vocation” itself comes from the Latin word for “voice.” Author Parker J. Palmer reminds us that vocation does not mean a goal that we pursue, but it’s a calling that we hear.³ He says, “Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be.”⁴ Our vocation then begins with listening to the inner voice of God to become our truest self in the pursuit of following Christ.

1. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “calling,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calling>.

2. Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 4.

3. Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000), 4.

4. *Ibid.*

Theologian Frederick Buechner goes further to define vocation as the place where “your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”⁵ As Buechner reminds us, our true vocation will make us come alive and help the world become a better place at the same time. But how do we discover our calling in life? The answer is simple, yet hard at the same time: we need to learn to listen.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

The problem is that it is harder to listen than ever before. We live in a world of noise, and with the abundance of messages we constantly encounter today, words have in many ways lost their meaning. We encounter messages in print, on signs, on billboards, on television and computer screens, and on our phones. We scan social media outlets and quickly read our emails and text messages. The average person is bombarded with over three thousand advertising messages every day.

One danger of living in this flood of messages is that the content drowns out the quiet voice of God. The result is that many Christians never really come to know God’s plan and purpose for their lives. In a world filled with distractions, we need a quiet place to reflect and pray, one in which we can more easily hear God speak to us when he calls us.

More than ever, we must learn to cultivate times of silence and solitude so we can slow down, reflect, and

5. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: The Seeker’s ABCs* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993), 119.

listen to the voice of God. This comes only as we create space in our busy lives for listening to God. There is no better way to develop this discipline than by pairing it with time alone in solitude. One result of making space for silence is that it attunes our ears to hear the voice of God, who often speaks quietly. When we pause to experience silence, we can begin to value and appreciate the meaning of God's Word.

We need prayers that arise from a deep place in our hearts, an experience of God, shaped by silence and solitude. These practices help us pray more thoughtfully as we stay focused on God and his kingdom. All too often, we hear without truly *listening*. Times of silence enable us to listen to the still, small voice of God. Otherwise, our prayers tend to be shallow, selfish, and lacking any serious reflection on the nature of God.

The biggest challenge to discovering our calling from God is the ability to listen deeply. More than ever before we need to learn the lost art of listening. There are two types of listening: one with the human ear, and one with a spiritual ear. Over time, we have become accustomed to listening with our outward ear at the expense of our inward ear. The result is that we have lost the art of listening with our spiritual ear. We need to recover the art of spiritual listening. As we seek to coach others, spiritual listening is essential. Spiritual listening involves two interconnected parts: praying and listening.

Deep listening flows out of prayer. This is sometimes referred to as "double listening," which involves listening to God and listening to culture. God often speaks through

events and circumstances, and we need to have the space to reflect on what is being said. According to John Stott,

Double listening is the faculty of listening to two voices at the same time, the voice of God through Scripture and the voices of men and women around us. These voices will often contradict one another, but our purpose in listening to them both is to discover how they relate to each other. Double listening is indispensable to Christian discipleship and Christian mission.⁶

Double listening will help us know how to respond in a prophetic and redemptive way, rather than just reacting to circumstances or going along with the world. Deep listening will help us respond to the burning needs of the day out of a place of prayer, rather than anxiety.

At the core of listening is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13, NIV). The Holy Spirit wants to give us wisdom, guidance, and direction. Therefore, it is essential to invite the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit to come and guide you as you seek to discern God’s calling on your life.

In the following pages, I want to invite you to explore your call by listening to different voices from across the beloved Asbury Seminary community who share their unique perspective on calling. There are chapters from

6. John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 29.

professors and stories from our alumni. The stories in this book will help you discern your own personal calling and vocation as a gift from God that is meant to be discovered, rather than a problem to be solved. Discovering our call is not a destination, but a lifelong journey of faith.

In Chapter 1, Stephen Seamands talks about our primary calling. In Chapter 2, Jessica LaGrone talks about hearing God's call. In Chapter 3, Brian Russell discusses the important connection between courage, calling, and spiritual growth. In Chapter 4, Ellen Marmon helps us discover the God who calls us. In Chapter 5, Jay Moon talks about the call to missions. In Chapter 6, Jonathan Powers reminds us that our calling flows from the call to live the baptized life. In Chapter 7, Ruth Anne Reese discusses the ordinary call. In Chapter 8, Sue Russell talks about how we are often called to live in liminality.

My prayer is that this book will inspire you to answer the call on your life to join in God's mission wherever He has called you to serve. As you read these pages, may the triune God speak to you and give you clarity about your own sense of calling and give you a deeper understanding of God's purpose and plan for your life.

— Dr. Winfield Bevins

CHAPTER 1

Our Primary Calling

Dr. Stephen A. Seamands

I was a young pastor in my mid-twenties, just three years out of Asbury Seminary, attending a daylong continuing education event for pastors. But before they introduced the main speaker I was looking forward to hearing, they trotted out a retired, white-haired Salvation Army officer to lead us in a time of prayer and worship.

His name was Lyle Rader. He was in his late seventies. Years later I would get to know his son, Paul Rader, who became the first American-born general and worldwide leader of the Salvation Army, who also served on Asbury Seminary's Board of Trustees for several years.

In his devotional talk, the elderly Lyle Rader began reminiscing about his relationship as a young Salvation Army officer with Samuel Logan Brengle. Brengle was a spiritual giant and a great leader in the Salvation Army during the early decades of the twentieth century. He was a powerful preacher and prolific author as well as a close friend of Henry Clay Morrison, the founder of Asbury Seminary. When Lyle Rader was a cadet in officer's

training school, Brengle became his friend and mentor. They developed a close Paul-Timothy type of relationship.

One day he asked Brengle a question that had been on his mind for a long time. “Sir, over the years, what have been your greatest temptations in ministry?”

Brengle was silent for a few moments. “Actually, I’ve only had *one* great temptation in ministry,” he said. “And I’ve learned that if I win the battle with this temptation, then it seems as if everything else in my life and ministry falls into place. But if I lose the battle here, it’s as if all hell breaks loose, and I find myself wrestling with lots of other temptations.”

Lyle Rader wasn’t expecting an answer like that. His curiosity was piqued, so he asked, “Well, then tell me, sir, what has been your *one* great temptation.”

I’ll never forget what Rader told us Brengle said: “It’s the temptation to want to do something *for* God each day before I’ve spent time *with* him.”

I needed to hear that because in my first few years after graduation from seminary, as I plunged into my work as a pastor, doing things *for* God had become my focus, not spending time *with* him. Moreover, when I did spend time with him—like a car pulling into a gas station when it’s running on empty—it was mainly so I could get fueled up to get back on the road again to do ministry. Spending time with him, deepening my relationship with him, rather than being an *end*, was essentially a means to the end of furthering the work of ministry.

I had forgotten what my primary calling was. So what Brengle said convicted me. And that conviction only

grew deeper as shortly thereafter I found myself drawn to studying Jesus' words to his disciples about ministry in John 15:1–16.

“I am the vine, you are the branches,” Jesus says (John 15:5, NRSV). Branches, of course, exist to bear fruit. In fact, Jesus warns us that if they don't bear fruit, they will be pruned away and thrown away. Bearing fruit matters, but branches can be fruitful *only* if they abide in the vine. “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NRSV).

According to Jesus, what matters most is abiding. In fact, ten times in this passage, Jesus *commands* his disciples, “Abide in me.” Don't miss the fact that it is a command. Even though fruit-bearing is important, there's no command in these verses to bear fruit. The command is to abide. That is our primary calling. Bearing fruit is not an end in itself; it is a consequence of abiding.

No one understood this better than Mother Teresa. She is famous for her incredible sacrificial ministry among the poor and the dying in Calcutta. But it is interesting what she said to Henri Nouwen when he was visiting with her in the 1970s. “Mother Teresa,” he had asked her, “How can I best go about fulfilling my vocation as a Catholic priest?” His question, in a way, was like the one that Lyle Rader asked Samuel Logan Brengle and not surprisingly, he got a similar answer.

“Oh, Henri,” she said smiling. “Just spend one hour a day in adoration of your Lord, and never do anything you know is wrong. And you will be all right.”

Nouwen said at first he thought Mother Teresa's response was a bit simplistic, but as he reflected upon it, he recognized its wisdom. "Like all great disciples of Jesus," he writes, "Mother Teresa affirmed again the truth that ministry can be fruitful only when it grows out of a direct and intimate encounter with our Lord."⁷

Often when we consider Christian calling, we immediately focus on what we are sensing Christ is calling us to do. But first and foremost, Jesus calls us to be with him, to abide in him. That is our primary calling. As Os Guinness puts it, we are called first to *someone*, not to *something* or *somewhere*.⁸

Those callings, as significant as they are, are secondary. Eventually, they will pass away. Our relationship with Christ is eternal. So the most important thing we Christian leaders are called to do each day is to abide in him, to deepen our relationship with him, to be a branch that abides in the vine.

In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers expresses it like this: "The main thing about Christianity is not the work we do, but the relationship we maintain, and the atmosphere produced by that relationship."⁹ He also maintains, "The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service for him."¹⁰

7. Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 31.

8. Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998), 31.

9. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), 217.

10. *Ibid.*, 18.

Let's consider, then, what Jesus says happens when we, as branches, abide in the vine. Understanding that will help us grasp why abiding—our calling to someone—is, in fact our primary calling and why it is so crucial if we are truly to be fruitful in our secondary callings—to something and somewhere.

Let's start with Jesus' words in John 15:9: "As the Father has loved me so have I loved you; abide in my love" (NRSV). Notice how abiding in him draws us into his love for us. When we abide in him, we are enveloped and encountered by the love of Jesus for us, love that is just like the Father has for him.

We get a glimpse into the measure and intensity of that love on the day of Jesus' baptism when he came up out of the water of the Jordan River and heard the Father's voice from heaven: "You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, NRSV). Moreover, it was that profound awareness of his Father's love for him—his acceptance and affection and affirmation—that was the foundation of his subsequent ministry and what sustained him in it.

In effect, then, Jesus is saying, "As the Father loved me—that's how I love you. So abide in my love." Or as I like to put it, "Abide—that means to soak in his love, to marinade in it!"

How desperately those of us in Christian leadership and ministry need to regularly hear Jesus saying to us what the Father, on the day of his baptism, said to him. "You're my daughter, my son, my beloved. I'm well pleased with you." During ministry, people will criticize us. They can

be ruthless and cruel. Mark it down, if you are a pastor, the sheep you've been called to shepherd will bite you. And when *they* don't do it, we often do it to *ourselves*. With our own negative self-talk, we beat ourselves up for our failures, weaknesses, and inadequacies.

It's as we abide in Him that we hear his dear voice of love, the voice of our beloved Jesus. And when we've been gripped anew and afresh by his love, when it has penetrated for the first time into some new place in our hearts, it won't matter what anybody else thinks or says about us. His love is enough! That's the first reason why abiding is so important. When we abide in him, we abide in his love and our ministry is infused and flows out of that love.

Here's a second reason: When we abide in him, he cleanses and prunes us, transforming and conforming us into his likeness. As Jesus emphasizes, "Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you" (John 15:2–3, NRSV).

When we abide in him, spending time in his presence, the darkness within us slowly comes up and is brought into the light. We encounter negative feelings and emotions—fear, anger, shame, frustration, disappointment. But instead of hiding or running from them, we are invited to bring them to our Lord Jesus.

As we do, he helps us to probe deeper to discover what's fueling those emotions. In his presence, we are brought face-to-face with our false self, with our idols. For example, I remember a day as I was praying when my conversation with Jesus went something like this: "Lord, I am

so angry. I'm so mad at so-and-so right now for the critical things he said about me the other day."

"I know, Steve," Jesus seemed to say in response, "And it really hurt, didn't it? It's good that you are honestly owning your anger and hurt. Yet why are you so sensitive to criticism? Why do you need the acceptance and approval of everyone so much? You've made an idol out of that, Steve. Aren't my love and approval of you enough? Do you have to have everybody else's too?"

Ouch! Jesus was revealing to me what my root problem was. Now I found myself repenting of my sin and acknowledging that I had in fact looked to the acceptance and approval of others for my identity instead of looking to him.

The Desert Fathers of the early church considered the silence and solitude we spend in the presence of Jesus to be a "furnace of transformation."¹¹ In fact, that is one of the reasons we often avoid taking time to abide in him. We don't want to face ourselves or have our false selves and idolatries exposed. We would much rather stay busy and bury ourselves in ministry to avoid the truth.

Yet we discover that in his presence, as we rest in him, amazingly, the more our darkness is exposed, the lovelier we are to him. When we abide in him, we encounter his love even as we experience his cleansing fire in the furnace of transformation.

Jesus mentions a third result of abiding in him when he says, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you,

11. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 27.

ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, NRSV).

Sometimes Jesus’ “ask for whatever you wish” has been taken as a blank check, *carte blanche* promise that means we can ask for anything we please whenever we please. But notice the promise is conditional: “If you abide in me and my words abide in you.”

The point is as we abide in him and his words abide in us, what Jesus wills and what we will become aligned, congruent with each other. We find ourselves praying as he did in Gethsemane, “Not my will, but thy will be done.” As his word abides in us, what *we* ask for and what *he* wills, along with *how* and *when* he wills it to be done, become one and the same.

Abiding is so vital and important in this process. For when we abide in him, we not only experience his love; we also experience his *friendship*. As Jesus emphasizes, “No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends” (John 15:15, ESV). So when we abide in him, he “friends” us. No, not on Facebook! But in a much profounder way. “I have called you friends,” says Jesus, “because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15, NRSV).

When we abide in him, Jesus reveals his heart to us. He tells us what he wants to do. Then as we surrender to *his* will, *our* will gets aligned with his, and we can ask for whatever we wish, and it will be done for us. Abiding—our primary calling—thus leads to friendship and intimacy with Jesus, which in turn leads to boldness and

authority in asking because what we're asking and what He's asking are one and the same.

In the midst of abiding, as we reflect and pray, as we struggle and surrender, all this gets worked out. As we abide, we get on the same page with God. And then amazing things begin to happen.

Let me mention a fourth consequence of abiding. Twice in this passage (John 15:4–5, NRSV) Jesus says, “Abide in me, *as I abide in you.*” What good news that is! Jesus promises that if we abide in him, *He will abide in us!*

After all, what those we minister to need is not more of you and me, but more of Jesus in you and me. And the way they are going to get more of Jesus is not because we determine we're going to be like Jesus, but because we allow Jesus to be Jesus in us. You see, Jesus doesn't need your help to be Jesus; he just needs your availability. He needs you to abide in him so he can abide in you.

As Duncan Campbell, the leader of the great Hebrides revival (1949–1952) often said, the greatest thing about us is not what we say or do, but “the impact of our unconscious influence, and that influence impregnated by the life of Jesus.”¹² If we abide in him—he promises—I will abide with you. Think of it this way: When we abide, Jesus can be Jesus in us. More and more, his personal presence can pervade our lives.

So far, we've considered four consequences of our primary calling of abiding in him. And we could go on to describe four other things mentioned in this passage that

12. Duncan Campbell, *The Price and Power of Revival* (Vinton, VA: Christ Life Publications, n.d.), 11.

Jesus says will happen when we abide: We will bear much fruit (v. 5); experience his joy (v. 11); glorify his Father (v. 8) and prove to be his disciples (v. 8).

Instead, I want to conclude by touching briefly upon the significance of spiritual practices (sometimes referred to as spiritual disciplines) in our lives. And especially for those of us in the Wesleyan tradition, the significance of the Wesleyan means of grace, particularly his five instituted means of grace (prayer, searching the Scripture, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian community/banding).

Given what we said about abiding, do you see why regular, habitual involvement in these practices is so vital and important? *The means of grace are the chief means of abiding.* These practices are not ends in themselves but means to the most important end of all—abiding in Christ so that he abides in us.

Don't be surprised if it takes you years to figure out how to fruitfully engage in these practices. You may feel like a failure much of the time. But don't let that discourage you. Remember, 85 percent of life is just showing up. So keep showing up. Keep practicing the means of grace. When it comes to our primary calling of abiding in Christ, there is simply no other way.

In 2009, I was privileged to accompany a group of Asbury Seminary Doctor of Ministry students on their visit to Korea. We had been invited to Korea by Bishop Sundo Kim, a long-time member of the Seminary's Board of Trustees. In fact, the single men's dormitory on the Seminary campus in Wilmore is named in his honor.

While we were in Korea, we spent a good deal of time at the Kwang Lim Methodist Church, the church in Seoul that Bishop Kim had pastored for many years and that had grown under his leadership to become the largest Methodist church in the world.

One day we went to visit Bishop Kim himself at his office up on the sixth or seventh floor of the office complex that's part of the Kwang Lim church campus. He was such a gracious host to us and shared with us profound wisdom borne out of his years of fruitful ministry.

But let me tell you what impressed me most during my time at Kwang Lim. It wasn't the vital worshipping congregation, state-of-the-art campus, gifted pastoral staff, or Bishop Kim's beautifully decorated, spacious office. Rather, it was the small 4' x 6' room connected to his office, the simple, unadorned "prayer closet" where Bishop Kim spends at least an hour each day reading scripture, praying—often on his knees—as he seeks to abide in Christ.

I still have the picture I took of his prayer closet. Because—and Bishop Kim would be the first one to tell you—that's where his ministry begins and ends. As he emphasized in speaking to us that day, "Without a prayer life, you will not know the will of God."

Throughout his ministry, Bishop Kim has understood what matters most. He has understood what his primary calling is. And you cannot understand the abundant fruitfulness of Christ's ministry through him apart from that. As Jesus says, "Those who abide in me and I in them, bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NRSV).

GOING DEEPER

How do you prioritize spending time with God each day before you do something for him?

How would you describe your primary calling?

Set your timer and take ten minutes today to spend time with God.

Voice: Adam Weber

*Lead pastor at Embrace Church in Sioux Falls, SD
MDiv, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007*

Adam Weber, lead pastor at Embrace Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, loves God, but like most humans, has sometimes struggled to love the different and difficult. After going through an incredibly difficult season, Adam found a new dimension to love. *Love Has a Name*, released August 25, 2020, shares a bit of his journey to love those who are unseen and overlooked, highlighting specific people who have taught him a little bit more about God's extravagant love.

As an unpopular kid in school, he always had a heart for those on the fringes. He sought for and found validation by loving others and receiving approval and acceptance in return. During what he calls "the dark night of the soul," he felt God's pruning him of the people-pleasing kind of love. After experiencing and realizing the extravagance of God's love, Adam believes the place from which he loves is different. Now, instead of loving others to satisfy his own self-worth, he loves others with no strings attached.

"My love for Jesus is what makes me want to engage in the George Floyd conversation," he said. "It's because of the love of Jesus that I want to extend grace to the

Pharisees. It's the reason that I want to extravagantly love other people. It's because of who Jesus is."

Love Has a Name looks at how we can love others with the grace and truth of Jesus. Every chapter is titled with the name of a specific person who loved Adam or someone he has loved, coupled with a similar person Jesus loved. In Chapter 19, Adam says that love pulls up a chair, offering a listening ear to someone who is different than you. Adam didn't just talk about pulling up a chair; he went to downtown Sioux Falls and offered a chair to others.

He ordered a pop-up desk, and after keeping it in a closet for eight or nine months, he made a deal with God. If one of two places with shade had parking, he would set up there. The second spot was open, and Adam set up his table with two chairs, a bobble head, plant, picture of his wife, and a sign that said, "Need to talk? Grab a seat."

Gerald, a well-dressed man in his fifties, sat down first. He shared about his job, the awards he had received, and the stress he felt. Suddenly, he started sobbing, sharing his anxiety and panic attacks. As Gerald talked and Adam listened, Adam asked if he would like to invite God into this. They prayed together and as Gerald left, he told Adam, "If for nobody else, you are here for me." Since then, Adam has set up his talking table more times than he can count, discovering each time that listening is a simple way to love someone else.

"So often we think it's got to be this grand thing, and sometimes it is a grand thing," Adam said. "We think we have got to give money, and sometimes we need to give money; we need to serve somebody. And sometimes, we

do need to serve somebody, but sometimes it's as simple as just listening to another person and hearing their story."

Adam's love for others isn't singular. He equips and empowers his congregation at Embrace to love others with abandon too. The COVID-19 pandemic has more than ever encouraged the Embrace congregation to exit the building and be the hands and feet of Jesus. Anyone connected to Embrace can apply for a Run Project grant up to \$2,000 to do something awesome for someone outside of themselves or their family. The church has found this is a great way to partner with what is already happening in their community.

"We want to come alongside of what God's doing in you out in the world, and we just want to help you run even faster," Adam said.

Adam has helped flip a teacher's lounge, done yard cleanup, and participated in a nursing home parade. A couple of current projects include painting a mural in downtown Sioux Falls and offering root beer floats and prayer to people. The heartbeat of this outreach is to challenge people to really obey Jesus and serve others.

"If you see an opportunity that you can help, that you can serve somebody, go do it," Adam said. "And there's not the, 'Hey, put Embrace's name all over it.' It's like, 'If it comes up, sure, you can mention it.' But the heartbeat is just to obey Jesus, so we really are challenging people to do that."

Adam knew since high school that he was called to tell others about Jesus but thought he would do that through business and marketing. His mentor presented

the idea of Embrace, and Adam reluctantly filled in as pastor on Labor Day weekend in 2006. Thirty-two people attended, and Embrace was born. In 2013, *Outreach Magazine* named it the fortieth-fastest-growing US church and the only United Methodist Church to be mentioned. Adam speaks at national conferences, has a blog, hosts [*The Conversation with Adam Weber* podcast](#), and wrote the best-selling book, *Talking with God*. He and his wife, Becky, have four kids: Hudson, Wilson, Grayson, and Anderson.

CHAPTER 2

Star Searching: Hearing God's Call

Rev. Jessica LaGrone

I was always a little jealous of Moses. He got to experience the jaw-dropping, awe-inspiring moment of a burning bush in the middle of the desert that told him exactly what he was supposed to do with his life and ministry. It seemed like such a clear and unmistakable method that I wondered why God didn't utilize it more often. When I heard other people talk about their "call to ministry" I wondered if they also had some kind of burning bush moment, a time when God clearly confirmed and clarified their call with a miraculous sign or an audible voice. Why didn't I hear from God like that?

Over the years of careful listening, growing in faith, and observing others who were clearly called, I began to see a different kind of pattern of how God revealed his plans. Slowly, and with much trepidation, I began to recognize that pattern in my own life as well.

Instead of one bright, burning bush moment, sometimes a sense of calling to ministry seemed to materialize

more like stars appearing in the night sky. When the sun first goes down, there's always one star that appears before many of the others. If you're paying attention, you can watch the others light up, one by one, as the sky darkens. An untrained eye will see only scattered points of light, beautiful but shapeless. But those who study the stars will begin to recognize the constellations, historic ways that stargazers have grouped stars together to create meaning through pictures and patterns, some of which were even used to describe ancient stories and legends. The stars have been used for many years to navigate and steer as travelers needed direction and guidance on their journey.

I believe there are similar points of light in each of our journeys to seek God's will and direction for our callings. Sometimes the points on our own journey will appear to be isolated moments or messages, stories that shine for one reason or another, but without giving clear direction. But if we can take a step back to look at the big picture, we might find that they form an arrangement or pattern, a picture that when we put the individual points together can help us make sense of what God has been doing in our past and what he might be calling us to in the future.

If we know where to be on the lookout for these points of God's activity in our lives, we may recognize the patterns that together make up a constellation of calling, helping us see the significance of God's action in our lives over spans of time and distance. If we want to see where God could be pointing us, here are some of the stars that can help guide us.

SCRIPTURE

For those who want to hear from God, there is no better place to start than in God's Word. If we believe that God gifted us with this incredible revelation in Scripture, it follows that he would want us to study, meditate, memorize, learn, and soak in the Word all that we can to learn more about him and his desires for our lives.

Although Scripture *doesn't* contain code that will spell out the first letters of the occupation you are supposed to work in or the organization you're called to serve, Scripture *will* outline the character and purpose of your calling.

- Scripture teaches us that each follower of Christ is a part of the priesthood of all believers and has a calling from God (1 Pet. 2:9). Our baptism acts as a consecration that not only offers us belonging in the family of God, but it also propels us into service to God's kingdom. Ministry isn't something reserved for a select few but the intended shape of all our lives when we are committed to Christ.
- Scripture reveals that we're all shaped differently with different purposes in God's kingdom, and that we shouldn't look at the gifts other people have and wish ours were more like theirs (Eph. 4:11–12; Rom. 12:4–8).
- Scripture describes the purpose of ministry: serving God and building up his church (1 Cor. 12; Gal. 1:10). The reminder that our ministries for God are intended to glorify God and not ourselves is a constant course correction that all of us needs to hear

again and again. The human temptation is to put ourselves at the center of all things, even to center our ministries for our own success, acclaim, and power. Scripture grounds us in the reminder that all glory belongs to God and that we serve him alone.

- Scripture tells the story of how people in history have reacted to their call from God. Those whose calling stories are recorded in Scripture often initially reacted with feelings of doubt and inadequacy. From Isaiah to Esther, Gideon to Peter, Jeremiah to Mary, those called by God often responded by saying something to the tune of, “Who? Me?” For those of us who have felt the tug of a calling and wanted to tell God he had the wrong number, Scripture helps remind us that we’re all inadequate without God’s help and that even the greatest examples of ministry in history have only been great because of God’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s power.

We’d all like to open the pages of Scripture and find a note tucked between the pages with directions for our lives spelled out. However, what we find there is even more powerful. A life steeped in Scripture offers relationship with God and long-term guidance for our lives, shaped around the life of Christ.

Over the years I’ve talked to many, many students who enroll in seminary because they feel called to study for a future in ministry, but they’re not sure what that ministry will look like. Many of them have struggled with doubt, wondering if they’re doing the right thing by

devoting years to study when they don't have a clear outcome or destination in ministry. I've often pointed them to Psalms: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (119:105, NIV). When God reveals clues to our calling, they often don't give us light that shines to unveil things far into our future. The light extends just a wide enough circle for the next step, and the next, a firm foothold on the path ahead but often not enough for an extended vision of the journey's end.

SPIRIT

Another way God provides points of light that make up the constellation of our calling is through the direction of the Holy Spirit. Jesus described the Holy Spirit as a counselor, one who would come to live in his followers to provide power, assurance, and direction. The Holy Spirit counsels and guides us on our journeys into ministry in many ways, giving direction through both inner promptings and external circumstances.

- The Holy Spirit may give direction through inner promptings. Discerning whether these are ways God is speaking takes practice and maturity, and almost all of us get it wrong from time to time. Checking our discerning of the Holy Spirit's voice with God's revelation of his Word and his character in Scripture is essential. If something in what we're hearing from the Spirit seems off from who God has revealed

himself to be in Scripture, there's a good chance the voice we're hearing is not from God.

- The Holy Spirit's work in external circumstances may open doors that lead us into our calling. A family who felt called to become missionaries on another continent needed to pay off debt in order to launch into ministry. A phone call came revealing a hidden source of unexpected income that matched the amount of the debt almost to the penny. This open door was a confirmation of their calling and faithfulness.
- Sometimes the Spirit can work in circumstances that close doors we thought were our pathway to certain ministries. Acts 16 describes a moment in Paul's journey where the Holy Spirit stopped him and his companions from preaching the Word in Asia and then closed a door for them to enter Bithynia (Acts 16:5–6). While this was clearly discouraging, the very next few verses indicate that the Spirit had another destination in mind. If circumstances seem to prohibit certain pathways to ministry, be patient and ask God what his intentions are for your next steps.
- Responding with obedience to the Holy Spirit in small things can strengthen your ability to hear from God for the larger points of discernment you'll encounter along the way. If you sense the Holy Spirit giving you a nudge, even a small one, respond with obedience and you may find that your ability to hear from the Spirit grows over time.

SENSE

When we begin to follow God, we don't abandon our common sense. In fact, Scripture tells stories of those who prayed to God for wisdom and then gave him credit when their inner sense of direction and ability to make decisions was strengthened (1 Kings 3:4–15). Christians who are growing in maturity can expect a deepening sense of wisdom within them. As with all the other stars in our constellation of discernment, we should always check this one with Scripture, making sure that what we sense is aligned with God's Word and God's character.

- You may have a sense that something is not right in the world. While others may notice it, you feel it deeply and can't shake it. You long to do something to right a certain injustice, or to serve a place of need that seems crucial to you. When you take steps toward reaching this need, you may experience a sense of satisfaction or fulfillment even if the need is still very real and present.
- Sometimes you will sense or observe the gifts God has given you. You may also have a sense of how these gifts fit with the needs you observe in the world. Ephesians 2:10 boldly makes the claim that “we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Eph. 2:10, NLT). Understanding ourselves to be God's masterpiece (in Greek his *poema*) means that we are uniquely created with gifts planted by God to do good things for and

with him. These gifts are clues that we can follow as part of the constellation of calling.

- You may have a sense that what you are presently doing with your life is not enough. A holy discontent may drive you to look beyond what presently fills your days for something of eternal significance. This desire to search for deeper significance and purpose can be a nudge from God deep within, prodding us to go looking for a way in which our gifts and the world's needs intersect.

For me, the sense of calling has always deepened as I listened and followed. If I had a small sense of what God wanted me to do, the more I did it, the more that sense grew. These indications of assurance or confirmation were like the pull of a magnet. The closer I got to it, the stronger the pull became.

SAINTS

We were never intended to puzzle out our purpose alone. God wants to surround each of us with community that can help speak into our lives. Where we are hesitant to name and recognize our own gifts for ministry, sometimes those around us have a clearer view, unobscured by self-doubt, baggage from the past, and anxiety over the future.

While we tend to assume that the title “saint” applies to characters in Scripture or to those who lived pure and holy lives long ago, saints are simply those who follow and serve Jesus. When Paul wrote letters to entire churches, he addressed the letters, “To the saints that are at Ephesus”

(Eph. 1:1, ESV), or, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2, NKJV). These weren't written to a few holy people in the church, but instead named as saints all the people following God. We can look to the saints who follow Jesus in our own context to provide wisdom and guidance as we seek our own confirmation that God is calling us.

During the years when my calling was both loudest and most confusing, God brought several people around me that spoke into my life and encouraged me to consider the possibility that I was called into ministry.

In my second year of college, I began to feel uncertain about the future I had begun planning and preparing for a career in medicine. My public speaking professor asked to meet with me and proposed that I sign up for an independent study the following semester in homiletics.

“What's homiletics?” I asked.

“It's preaching,” he told me.

When I told him I was a biology/pre-med major and had never preached in my life, he said, “But, Jessica, every speech you have given in my class has been about God. Those were sermons.”

During that same year, a pastor back at my home church sent me information about a conference for young adults called to pastoral ministry. I had no idea why he thought that was a good idea, since I was clearly heading for a career in medicine, but a free vacation to another state sounded fun, so I went. That conference provided moments of searching, beautiful moments discerning in

community with others, and compelling preaching that helped me begin to ask questions about the direction of my future.

I started going to a college Bible study where the leaders thought it was a good idea for me to join the leadership team and teach and preach to my peers, and while I was unsure about my own gifts, I trusted them until I could trust myself. That summer a church contacted me (I still have no idea how they got my name or phone number!) and asked me to become their youth minister for the next year. The experience testing out my gifts in that church and hearing the affirmation of the saints there was invaluable as I began to move closer to the magnetic pull of a call to ministry.

By the time I put all these pieces together, searching the Scriptures, listening to the Spirit, developing a sense of my gifts and passions in ministry, and hearing the voices of many, many saints in my life who pointed the way for me, I finally concluded that I was called into ministry. When I began to tentatively tell people, with fear and trepidation, what I was discovering, it turned out that no one else was surprised. I was the last one to know! Listening to the saints around me was a major part of hearing from God about the next steps in ministry.

Talk to those around you who have a deep relationship with the Lord. Share with them some of the points of light you've been noticing in your own experience and time with God, and then ask them to speak into your life and help you to find patterns of meaning and direction.

SERVICE

One of the best ways to discern a calling to serve in ministry is . . . to serve in ministry. You don't have to wait until you have a degree or a job description or a paycheck to serve in God's kingdom. There are always places in the local church or in ministries around you that need and appreciate help. As you are serving in these roles, you will be receiving all kinds of data about how God has created you, about the best fit for your gifts, and about how different ministries and ministers function. The experiences and feedback you receive while you serve can help you discern what a future in service to God will look like.

CONCLUSION

Not all of us have a burning-bush moment, but God longs to speak to each of us. Since the beginning of time God has spoken to different people in different ways. Don't expect God to speak to you in the same way that he has spoken to others. Instead, listen carefully and let him know that you are willing to obey. Remember that in the end it's not about how you hear your call, but how you respond to it that matters.

Make sure that you tell God that you are longing to listen and seeking to follow. Some of the best answers to calling in Scripture have been:

- Here I am, send me (Isa. 6:8, NIV).
- Speak Lord, for your servant is listening (1 Sam. 3:7–11, NIV).
- Not my will, but Yours be done (Luke 22:42, NIV).

These are all beautiful and meaningful prayers to send up repeatedly as you search the skies, connecting the dots of God's work and will for your life.

Discerning the direction of our calling can seem like a daunting task. The small points of light emerging may seem isolated until you are able to connect them and see the picture they are creating for you, a constellation of order, purpose, and light for your path. The great news is that as much as we long to hear, God longs even more to speak, to grow closer to us, and to walk with us into a beautiful, star-studded future.

GOING DEEPER

Take a few moments to look back on your past and reflect on the ways you have seen God at work. What patterns do you see in the past that point to what God might be calling you to do in the future?

Look at a few of the stories of calling in Scripture—Isaiah, Gideon, Peter, Esther, Jeremiah, and Mary. How do you see yourself reflected in their stories?

Often God reveals his calling on our lives through our circumstances or influential people. What opened doors are you being invited to walk through? How have those you trust been speaking truth into your life?

Voice: M’Kenna Gillespie

Chaplain

MDiv, Asbury Seminary, 2021

Prior to coming to Asbury Seminary, M’Kenna had no idea what she wanted to do with her life. In fact, she changed her degree once before arriving on campus and again during her first year of seminary. But her time at Asbury Seminary helped to ground her academically and spiritually. Her coursework, chaplaincy internship, and formational experience as part of the Community of St. Anslem (CoSA) at Lambeth Palace in London, England, helped her know God personally, develop a prayer life and learn to love herself so she could love her neighbor.

During her clinical pastoral education (CPE) program at the University of Kentucky Hospital, M’Kenna completed clinical training, made hospital visits, responded to calls, and learned different aspects of chaplaincy care. After completing the program in 2018, she realized she had found her spot in ministry.

“For a long time, I felt like the only thing I was good at is loving people, but I struggled with that because I said, ‘Well, what good is that? You can’t put it on a resume,’” she said. “And then when I started doing CPE, I found the place where I could do just that. And it was the place where I finally felt like my passion, calling, and gifts aligned.”

That fall, M’Kenna joined CoSA in London, England, for a year-long, immersive, structured season of prayer, rest, reflection, and growth. CoSA was founded in 2015 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, and invites people ages twenty to thirty-five into one year of monastic life, or as they call it, life in God’s time.

M’Kenna’s cohort of thirteen gathered three to four times daily for corporate prayer, daily eucharist, and personal, silent prayer. On Wednesdays, the community participated in “desert mornings,” where each person remained silent until 2 p.m. This allowed for extra time to connect with God through prayer, art, outdoor walks, and spiritual reading. The CoSA community also completed the tasks of daily living, such as cooking, laundry, and planning and participating in group gatherings and choir practice together. Through this time, her faith transitioned from being merely academic to personal, and her almost non-existent prayer life grew.

“It was a slow process because we had carved out time for multiple times of prayer throughout our day,” she said. “We had three to four corporate services and two different times of personal prayer. They would introduce us to different types of praying, different topics, methods. And it was a struggle for me, especially growing in the silent prayer.”

As the time for her seven-day silent retreat approached, she felt terrified by the impending loneliness if she didn’t learn to hear from God. But during one of her first prayer times, praying through Psalm 103, she discovered that she

was actually having a conversation with God for the very first time.

“I realized that I was learning to discover the love of God in my life, was learning to discover his voice and actually believing that he wanted to talk to me,” she said. “It was a huge step, in that I was just realizing that I did have access to God and that God wasn't so distant from me after all.”

She also learned to connect with God through meaningful imagery. On a retreat, the Lord revealed to her that he was the gardener of her heart. On that same retreat, a nun reminded her that in all of life, but especially in her future work as a chaplain, she would love and lose people, but that their love is incarnated on her heart. M'Kenna began to see herself in a garden with the Lord, but the earth was cracked and desert-like. Within each crack, the seed of each person that she had loved or been loved by started growing into a beautiful garden.

“There's a temptation in chaplaincy to take your work home with you,” she said. “And the truth is you just can't do that. When I especially feel myself tempted to do so when I'm grieving someone, I try to go back to that place in the garden and to just plant a seed for them and to give them to the Lord, but also acknowledge that they impacted me as well.”

M'Kenna planned to return to the Seminary's Kentucky campus to complete her degree, but as her first year ended, she was invited to stay for a second year to serve the cohort behind her by facilitating retreats, leading teaching sessions, doing administrative tasks, and serving as a

role model. After making and praying through a pros and cons list, she realized all the cons were becoming pros. Her roommate and others encouraged her to apply, and during her prayer times, she felt the Lord, as well as the rest of the leadership team, affirming her calling. In her second year, she learned to love herself, practice self-care, and appreciate the gifts she had been given to serve others.

“It was a gift that CPE and CoSA backed up to one another,” she said. “In CPE, I became aware of learning areas that I needed to pursue and CoSA gave me time to do that and put into practice one of the most important things in chaplaincy: self-care.”

M’Kenna graduated with a Master of Divinity in spring 2021 and plans to complete a chaplaincy residency at the University of Kentucky.

CHAPTER 3

Courage, Calling, and Spiritual Growth

Dr. Brian D. Russell

Feel called by God? Courage is the key that unlocks the door to the future that God dreams for you.

In this essay, you'll gain an understanding of the critical role that courage plays in combination with deep spiritual formation in living out your calling. You'll also discover and feel a growing confidence and desire to take the next steps in your journey. Finally, you'll have a blueprint for moving forward and for helping others in the future.

GOD'S COMMISSIONING OF JOSHUA

Let's start our exploration by considering Joshua. In Joshua 1:1–9, God commissioned Joshua to serve as the leader of God's people. Moses had died on the brink of entry into Canaan (Deut. 34). Canaan was the land long ago promised to the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. God had delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, forged

a covenant at Sinai, and led a new generation through the wilderness to the banks of the Jordan. Now Moses was dead, along with his entire generation. It fell to Joshua to lead God's people forward into the land. It is stunning to reflect on the task entrusted to Joshua. God painted a vivid and compelling portrait of abundant life in Canaan.

God said:

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. (Joshua 1:3–6, NRSV)

God's calling of Joshua offers us the following takeaways: Commit to living out the biggest vision of your call. Show up and be courageous. Be consistent in your spiritual formation. Embed yourself in a community that strengthens and affirms you. Keep moving ahead and be astonished by what God might do.

God's promise to Joshua about the future was immense, but it required bold and daring action by Joshua and Israel. Action is always a must. God calls, but faithful men and women must respond with real skin in the game.

God intended to give Joshua and God's people the land, but they had to walk physically into it. If God's people wanted to experience the totality of God's promise, they had to put the soles of their feet on each acre. Otherwise, the promise would remain merely a distant hope.

The key for Joshua and God's people was *courage*. Courage is the ability to act in the moment despite fear and uncertainty of outcome. Courage is the virtue that each of us must develop and nurture in order to embrace the life of God's dreams. To amplify this point God exhorted Joshua to be "Strong and courageous" three times (vv. 6–9).

Courage is the key that opens the door to the future that God dreams for us. It was true in Joshua's day. It remains true for us.

A TRANSFORMATIONAL TRIP TO THE BEACH AND A LESSON ON COURAGE

Years ago, when my children were young, our family vacation to the beach was in serious danger. We had booked a hotel on the beaches of Clearwater on the Gulf Coast of Florida to experience tranquil waves and relaxation. Instead, Clearwater Beach had morphed into "Choppy Water Beach." For wave lovers this may have been paradise, but not for my youngest daughter, Katie. When she was a preschooler, she was sensitive to loud noises. So, unfortunately, the sound of crashing waves was too much for her. She cowered under a towel behind our beach chairs. She was crying and said she wanted to go back home. The waves were not forecast to improve much, so

it looked as though I may have wasted money on a beach vacation in which we would not be spending much time at the beach.

I sat down near Katie and coaxed her out from under her towel. I purposefully turned us away from the waves to help her relax. She told me that she was afraid and wanted to go home.

I asked, “Don’t you want to have fun with me and your sister?”

“Yes, Dad, but the waves scare me.”

“It’s okay to be afraid, Katie. Everyone feels fear. We are all afraid of something or someone.”

“Really? What do you do when you are afraid, Dad?”

“Let me tell you about a superpower called *courage* that we can all learn to use with God’s help.”

Courage is the key that unlocks our future. I taught Katie this deep truth that morning on the beach. I then invited her to walk step-by-step toward the very waves that she feared. I promised to hold her hand all the way into the water. She was shaking at first, but I kept reminding her that *courage is the key* and that I would be with her.

Courage is more than an Old Testament concept connected with Joshua. Courage is one of the four cardinal virtues of the Christian faith. Courage is the one virtue that makes the other cardinal virtues (wisdom, justice, and self-control) possible. Without courage we will be unable to act when the going gets tough, and it always does get tough.

Courage is the ability to face our deepest fears in the moment and *act* anyway. Most of us admire courage when

we see it because it is so rare. Courage is rare because, let's face it, if you are in a situation that demands courage, it is easier to retreat or give up or compromise. Courage is also rare because it doesn't feel good in the moment. It doesn't feel good because standing firm and acting when we are afraid goes against our intrinsic *survival* instinct. In fact, courage never feels good until after the fact. Courage is needed because *fear* always arises whenever we find ourselves on the precipice of change.

Stephen Pressfield, in *The War of Art*, calls this feeling the "resistance." Resistance always stands between us and God's beckoning call to do or create something new. Resistance blocks us from walking into the bigger and deeper life into which God is inviting us. Fear is a crippling emotion that creates anxiety, flight responses, loss of bodily control, the inability to think, and downright panic. To be courageous is to experience all these feelings and act anyway. As Christians, to be courageous is to embrace God's call and move forward despite the fog of "what ifs" and our fear of failure, personal cost, and sense of lack.

The walk to the water that morning seemed as though it took forever, but we made it. Katie gingerly dipped her toes in. When a wave rolled her way, she began to pull back. I again whispered, "Courage, Katie. Courage."

That first morning was still tough for her. I had to coax her back into the water several times. By the afternoon she was a new girl. She was able to go out with her sister and float around on pool noodles. My daughters rode them as though they were sea horses. As I moved closer to them in the water, I could hear Katie singing to herself.

The words put a smile on my face. She sang: “Courage is the key to victory. It opens up the door for us to explore.” She repeated this refrain over and over. My job as a dad was done.

Courage is the key that unlocks the door to the future that God dreams for you, too. Courage is critical to embrace and live out God’s call on your life. Let’s go deeper.

COMMITTING TO THE GRANDEST VISION OF YOUR CALL

Let’s focus on your calling. It’s vital to get clear on the mission you sense that God desires for you to embrace.

How is God inviting you to serve in his mission? Ask God to show you. Ponder it deeply. Lay it out in your mind. Even better, write it down in a journal. Be vivid and descriptive. Don’t undersell it. Think big. Imagine yourself living it out.

Too often we settle on the ordinary when God desires the extraordinary. During its recent successful capital campaign, Asbury Seminary used this slogan, “Attempt Something Big.” A longer version of this slogan is found in author Jamie Buckingham’s quotation: “Attempt something so big that unless God intervenes, it is bound to fail.”

Such a goal is not self-delusion. It is not about cultivating illusions of our own grandeur. Instead, it’s a challenge to break out of our self-imposed limitations that handcuff us to mediocrity and playing it safe rather than leaning fully into God’s good future.

If your dream is merely reliving some past accomplishment, it's probably not God's dream. If we only try what we've achieved previously, we will find ourselves trapped in the cycles of our past. Think about Israel during Moses and Joshua's time. Israel's sojourn at Sinai and in the wilderness had positives and negatives. But Joshua and Caleb were the only members of the Exodus generation to enter the promised land because they alone remained faithful to God's calling. Even Moses and Aaron faltered.

The same Israel that had experienced the Passover, crossed through the Red Sea, and ate manna and quail in the desert failed when Moses was on the mountain receiving the law. They quickly receded to their pagan past rather than living into the new vision to which God had called them. Aaron led the people in making the golden calf. Then instead of marching boldly into the promised land, Israel faltered and disobeyed God's call because of their fear of the superiority of the Canaanites. In Numbers 20, rather than relying afresh on the power of God, Moses struck the rock with his rod as if he had to recreate the past miracle of Exodus 17:1–7 in his own strength. This rash action caused him to forfeit his future in Canaan.

All your past has prepared you for the future as long as you recognize that if you are answering God's call, your future will likely be larger in scope than your past and involve new abilities that you don't yet possess. But that's okay. New capabilities will arrive in due course. They arrive as the result of your moving forward. You don't have to have the gifts and talents in advance. Think about it. Joshua wasn't fully prepared to lead God's people into the

land against heavily armed opponents, but he was fully committed to the vision that God gave him.

What about you? Do you have a big enough dream? Or do you intentionally undercut it out of fear of potential failure or a sense of lack? Or are you merely trying to recreate some past glory rather than attempt the new thing that God truly desires?

If there isn't the possibility of failure, your sense of calling might not be big enough. Once you've written down the dream that you sense God has for your life, read over it one more time. Then ask yourself these two questions: "*What else?*" and, "*Am I holding back anything that God has put on my heart?*" Get it all out on paper.

COURAGE AND FEAR

The biggest culprit that limits our ability to live fully into God's calling is fear. Fear weakens us so that we shrink back from God's future, but courage makes us strong. God empowers our courage by means of his presence. In Joshua's calling, God made this promise: "As I was with Moses so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Josh. 1:5, NRSV). It is at this point that God proclaimed the first of the three exhortations, "Be strong and courageous" (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9, NRSV). God reinforced the need for Joshua to push through fear in verse nine: "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (NRSV).

Courage is necessary because fear is real. If Joshua still needed to be reminded of courage, how much more do

we? Joshua had witnessed the miraculous actions of the Exodus and Red Sea. He had heard God's voice proclaim the Ten Commandments at Sinai. He had experienced God's provision in the wilderness. He had participated in the victorious battles in the Transjordan over the kingdoms of Sihon and Og. Yet God still had to exhort him three times: "Be strong and courageous."

Fear always presents itself when we are on the precipice of a new beginning. To move through our fears, it is critical to name them. Fears typically present themselves as obstacles or negative thoughts.

Just as it is critical to formulate a vivid statement of your sense of calling, it is important also to name your fears and obstacles. Answer this question: *What am I afraid of?* Be honest.

From a deep spiritual perspective, fear is a form of idolatry. Whatever we fear functions as a false god that enslaves us and forges chains that thwart our ability to live out God's mission. John Wesley memorably exhorted Methodists:

Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth.¹³

13. John Wesley to Alexander Mather, August 6, 1777.

Courage is the virtue that allows us to feel fear and act anyway. Imagine how much more of yourself you could surrender to God if you were to be free of the fears that bind you. Ask the Lord to give you the courage of Joshua. But courage alone will not guarantee God's future.

CALLING AND OUR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In addition to courage, we must consistently cultivate a godly character through deep formative practices and healthy spiritual rhythms. Long-term vitality in living out our calling depends on our rootedness in God. The key to Joshua's success was his faithfulness to God, not his tactical brilliance as a military leader. When God exhorted Joshua to be courageous, God was indeed calling Joshua to lead God's people into the land, but the means of doing this were not what you might expect for a person preparing for an invasion. Listen to Joshua 1:7–8:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. (NRSV)

The most important work of Joshua was a commitment to deep formation. He had to embrace the courage to live out faithfully God's instructions from the Scriptures received through Moses. God was calling Joshua to immerse himself in Scripture to model faithfulness and holiness to others. This would be the key to his success and prosperity.

Joshua 5 reinforces the theme of cultivating a godly character. As Israel prepared to campaign against Jericho, they did not practice military formations or script battle plans. Instead, God's people engaged in robust personal and communal formational practices.

First, in Joshua 5:1–9, there was a ritual circumcision of the men to mark them as belonging to the Lord. I am certain that no other military force has ever used circumcision as a means of preparing for battle.

Second, in Joshua 5:10–12, God's people celebrated the Passover. This feast commemorated the Exodus from Egypt and reminded God's people of the mighty actions of God in achieving their liberation from slavery and bringing them into the land.

Last, in Joshua 5:13–15, Joshua encountered an angel of the Lord outside of Jericho. Joshua learned a final vital lesson. He inquired whether this messenger with a drawn sword was on his side or on the side of the Canaanites. The angel replied, "Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (v. 14, NRSV). The key question for Joshua was not whether the angel was on his side, but whether Joshua had his own allegiance right. He immediately fell on his face in worship and asked for instructions. The only instructions he received were these:

“Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy” (v. 15, NRSV). All these episodes reinforce a key idea. Our personal holiness and rootedness in God are more critical to our future success than the skills and talents that we possess. Scottish pastor Robert Murray M’Cheyne once wrote, “The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.”

For Joshua, a commitment to deep growth meant his embracing the courage to read the book of the law received from Moses. For us, it means having the courage to cultivate and consistently practice a set of healthy rhythms to fuel us in our life with God. John Wesley called these rhythms the means of grace. We may also think of them as our rule of life or habits of holy living. They are the intentional habits that we practice daily (or at least most days) that shape and mold us into persons who reflect the love of God in Christ to others.

The foundation of these habits will involve the classic spiritual practices of reading Scripture, praying, Sabbath rest, and public worship, which includes the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Remember that these are not burdens but gifts from the Lord. Experiment with different times of day and durations to find what works best for you personally. Your devotional life is yours alone and may not look exactly like someone else’s. The great danger in the spiritual life is to become frustrated by merely mimicking another’s pattern but never finding the rhythm that allows your soul to sing.

The breakthrough for me personally was breaking my devotional practices into two segments that frame my day.

I begin and end each day with a set of habits that allow me to nourish my soul, contemplate God's love for me and the world, and to replenish and prepare for the next day. Before working each day, I sit in silence for twenty minutes, pray, journal, and read Scripture. I close each day with a time of thanksgiving and journaling. It took me until I was forty-five years old to find a rhythm that worked because I always thought that I needed to be just like my own mentors. We all need to practice the means of grace, but free yourself to find what works best for your way of being.¹⁴

As you grow in grace, I also encourage you to explore other practices such as fasting, sitting in silence, and journaling. Furthermore, don't neglect taking care of your physical body. We are, after all, embodied souls, so take just as seriously what you eat, how much you sleep, and how much you exercise. Diet, sleep, and exercise are also critical components to living fully as the people God created us to be.

COMMUNITY AND CALLING

God's future is not a solo performance. Each of us must find a community that supports and empowers us. God called Joshua to lead a community. In fact, the final call

14. There are two recent and outstanding resources from members of the Asbury Seminary family:

Winfield Bevins and Mark Dunwoody, *Healthy Rhythms for Leaders: Cultivating Soul Care in Uncertain Times* (Exponential, 2021) and Alastair Sterne, *Rhythms for Life: Spiritual Practices for Who God Made You to Be* (IVP, 2020).

to be “strong and courageous” does not come from God but from God’s people. In Joshua 1:16–18, God’s people responded to Joshua’s sharing of God’s promises and his calling by affirming their support. They ended with the same words that God had used to encourage Joshua, “Only be strong and courageous” (1:18, NRSV).

As you seek to live out the calling that you have received, be certain to share it with others and ally yourself with people who affirm and support you. The late trainer Jim Rohn taught, “You are the average of the five people who you spend the most time with.” Joshua’s generation was successful because of the depth of community and commitment that each member shared. In Joshua 21:45 we read, “Not one of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass” (NRSV). Yes, God was faithful, but so were Joshua and the people of Israel.

Think about your circle of closest friends and mentors. Do you have a network of persons who hold you accountable to deep spiritual growth and holiness, encourage you, and help you to fan into flame the calling that God has laid on your heart? If you don’t, pray to the Lord for such a team. All of us need to be around wise and deeply rooted men and women who are walking moment by moment by God’s grace into ever-expanding levels of love for God and neighbor. Our long-term success and thriving in ministry turn on consistent and mutually edifying fellowship with likeminded fully committed followers of Jesus. Find your community today.

REFUSE A COURAGE-FREE FUTURE

The book of Joshua ends with Joshua's addressing the assembly of God's people near the end of his life. His words in Joshua 23:6 echo his own calling. He reminded God's people of the journey ahead and the need for ongoing courage and faithfulness: "Therefore be very strong in observing and doing all that is written in the book of the law of Moses." (translation mine). His words remain a vital exhortation and reminder to us still today.

Friend, refuse the temptation of a courage-free future. Don't settle for living into the minimum of God's calling. Embrace it in its fullness. When fear arises, remember God's promise of presence and be courageous to act despite fear. Cultivate a godly character through the consistent practice of holy habits. Embed yourself in a community of others on the same journey. Then prepare yourself to be astonished five, ten, twenty, even fifty years from now when you look back to today and see how far you got. Commit to all that God has for you. Courage is the key that unlocks the door to the future of God's dreams.

GOING DEEPER

What takeaways does Joshua's call story offer us?

Courage is the ability to act in the moment despite fear and uncertainty of outcome. How is God inviting you to be courageous?

What holy habits can you engage in individually or in community to combat fear and anxiety and live courageously?

Voice: Rev. Dr. Iosmar Alvarez

*United Methodist Church District
Superintendent, Lexington, KY
Doctor of Ministry in Church Planting,
Asbury Theological Seminary, 2017*

Iosmar Alvarez emigrated to the US from Cuba with the American dream of a lucrative job, a nice house, and church attendance on Sunday. When he arrived in the US in 2001, God called him to lead and serve among the Hispanic people. He has served as the senior pastor of Fuente de Avivamiento in Lexington, Kentucky, as the CEO of Disciple 21 Church Planting Network, and is now the District Superintendent in Lexington, Kentucky. His goal is to plant 2,500 churches by 2028, using traditional and non-traditional methods to make disciples for Christ.

“We have [more than fifty million Hispanics] in the US,” Iosmar said. “I believe the way we’re doing church is not the way we should be moving in the twenty-first century. My vision is for an organic, Acts 2 church.”

As a veterinary doctor and surgeon in Havana, Cuba, Iosmar had everything he wanted, but was still dissatisfied. One day, Iosmar heard of a revival service in which miracles were happening. He decided to check it out.

“The moment I showed up, the preacher looked at me and said, ‘God has a plan for your life and he’s waiting for you,’” Iosmar said. “I just left.”

Curiosity brought him back, and the pastor did the same thing. Iosmar went to the altar, not as a seeker, but to see what was happening. The Holy Spirit surrounded him and three months later, Iosmar accepted Christ.

“After I received Christ, I became a disciple-making machine,” Iosmar said. “It’s part of my personality. I’m either 100 percent in or out.”

Iosmar had accepted Christ in August 2001, and he and his wife planted their first church seven months later in the US. Iosmar and his wife had just planted their second church when she was killed in a car accident in 2003. In the aftermath, he reevaluated his life, realizing that one’s relationship with Christ is the only thing that matters. Iosmar learned more about who his God really was and grew stronger in his faith.

“The Holy Spirit said to me in prayer, just keep walking and you will see her again,” Iosmar said. “She’s not in your past, but in your future.”

In 2005, Iosmar came to Lexington, Kentucky to help plant Hope Springs Church, a bilingual worshiping community. Last year, he realized it was time to grow. Fuente de Avivamiento was born.

“We spent the whole year without a building, moving from one church to the next like Israel in the desert, but the whole congregation grew,” he said.

Currently, Fuente de Avivamiento has more than four hundred members and one hundred house churches. In

his ministry, he has found that many don't feel comfortable going to traditional churches but do feel comfortable in someone's home. Typically, house church has three main sessions: loving, learning, and leading.

"Loving connects people to each other through prayer, worship, and covenant," Iosmar said. "Learning involves teaching, responding, and offerings, while leading is the multiplication phase of sharing the gospel and ways to target the community."

In his church plants he encourages new believers to harness their first love found in Christ.

"The moment a new believer is on fire, we send him or her out [to do ministry]," he said. "The most effective weapon of God is a Christian still in the first-love stage. Weapons belong on the field, not in the warehouse."

Iosmar graduated with his Doctor of Ministry in Church Planting. He also has the honor of training leaders nationwide on how to plant churches and develop church cultures and processes to make disciples, and he serves as the District Superintendent in the Lexington district.

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CHAPTER 4

May I Ask Who's Calling, Please?

Dr. Ellen L. Marmon

My parents were serious about phone etiquette. Seriously, they were. They gave my sister and me a specific script to follow: *ring, ring . . .* “Hello, Marmons. This is Ellen speaking.” If the person on the other end of the line (and I do mean *line*) didn’t identify themselves, the script required a follow-up inquiry: “May I ask who’s calling, please?” Remembering to ask this last question saved me dozens of steps and more than a few lectures. If, for instance, I put the phone receiver down on the kitchen counter and walked out to the family room to let Dad know he had a call but couldn’t tell him who was calling, I was sent right back to the kitchen to ascertain the caller’s identity. With that critical intel, I then retraced my steps, stood by Dad’s La-Z-Boy recliner, and announced, “It’s Mr. Myer.” Armed with all the proper information needed for a respectable phone conversation, Dad folded down his chair and headed for the kitchen. I told you this phone etiquette business was serious.

As odd as it may seem, recalling my family's phone etiquette routine led me to thinking about God. Don't hang up on me yet; I promise to make sense of all this. These days I don't have to ask who's calling. Either the programmed ringtone or my cell phone display tells me, and I can decide right then and there whether I want to answer. An unfamiliar number is a definite no; the friend who wants her book back that I don't remember borrowing is an "I can't talk right now" message. My nephew, niece, or goddaughter? *Always* a yes. There's no doubt about it—*knowing who's calling makes a difference in how I respond to a call.*

THE QUESTION

As Christians we often talk about this idea of being "called into ministry." Some of us can give time-and-place-accounts of very certain directions from God. Others of us are less exact about our call and wish it were more prescriptive (#blueprintplease). Faculties in theological education settings require students to write about their calling for an assignment; small group leaders at church encourage people to discern their call in community; New Testament writers challenge us to live a life worthy of our calling. Too often, however, Christians feel pressure to verify their calling with a spiritually acceptable job title and an extensive, five-year plan.

What if, when we reflect on discerning a call to ministry, we begin the process with identifying the Caller? Rather than anxiously interrogating ourselves and one another about what we're created to *do*, what if we posed a

different kind of question altogether? Try this one: *May I ask who's calling, please?* By asking this question first, at the very least, we'll retrace our steps less often and quite possibly endure fewer lectures about proper phone etiquette.

When we focus on the *Caller* primarily, and the *call* secondarily, our perspective moves away from ourselves (our lives, our plans, our . . .) and moves toward God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the very One who is calling. Call me crazy, but I just don't see a downside to shifting our attention in God's direction.

THE CALLER

Scripture testifies to a calling God. From the very beginning (almost), God called to the newly created human beings, "Where are you?" Ever since Genesis 3, the Creator has been calling people back into a covenant relationship (a relationship that God makes possible through divine, sacrificial love). We can learn a great deal about the Caller by watching God's interactions with all kinds of people in Scripture. God always initiated the connection, calling men and women to a relationship first. Sometimes God followed up with a job to do or a role to fulfill, like with Abraham or Samuel (Gen. 12; 1 Sam. 3). Often, however, the priority of the meeting was a new or renewed relationship with God. Let's eavesdrop on two of these holy encounters.

If I asked you to identify ten calling stories from the biblical narrative, my guess is that Hagar would not show up on your list. Yet God hosted not one, but two surprising conversations with this Egyptian slave. God saw

her desperation, called her by name, and posed two very complex questions. “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” What kind of God pays attention to people at the bottom of the culture’s social structure? Who engages an uneducated slave with such serious queries?

As soon as God addressed Hagar by her name, we know our Caller is personal. God ascribes value to those who, if noticed by others at all, are deemed worthless in society’s eyes. The Caller sees differently than people do. As a result of God’s calling out Hagar’s name, “She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me’” (Gen. 16:8, NIV). Hagar not only experienced God as seeing her; she discovered that God heard her as well. Finally, as a part of this redemptive conversation, God gave Hagar short-term instructions and a long-term promise¹⁵ (Gen. 16:9–15, NIV).

Hagar’s second encounter with the Lord was even more dramatic. Permanently exiled from Abraham’s protection, she laid her son under some shade and waited for death to take them both. Again, the Caller saw Hagar and asked her what she was doing. Once more, we witness a God who heard the cries of a person in agony as an abandoned woman and a mother. This time, God provided immediate help (water) and a reason for hope (Gen. 21:8–20). Few things are as meaningful to human beings as being called by their name and as being truly

15. Ishmael, the name of Hagar’s son, means “God hears.”

seen and heard by another. The nature of the One who's calling is steadfast, purposeful, and compassionate. God sees, hears, and loves us.¹⁶

Let's return to your top-ten-calling-stories-in-the-Bible list. Who chose the woman with the issue of blood? (Awkward silence . . .) That's just it—*nobody* chose to remember her after she became ill. Here is another tender encounter that reveals essential information about God's character through the Son. Much more personal than a number that pops up on a cell phone screen, Luke 8:43–48 identifies a courageous woman and reveals the Caller's nature in doing so. This woman, who had dealt with a bloody discharge for twelve years, was trying to get to Jesus's outer garment hem. Believing that if she touched it, she'd be healed, she violated dozens of ceremonial and social laws and ventured into the crowd.

The consequences of her illness were dire. She was separated from people for being "unclean." No one had eaten a meal with her, talked with her about the weather, or allowed her to participate in community events for twelve years. And now, even amid a crowd, people bumping into each other and stumbling over each other's feet, God the Son saw her. As soon as the woman's fingers met his robe, Jesus sensed power leaving him and entering her. By now we're not surprised that Jesus first addressed her with a

16. Henri Nouwen asserts, "Knowing God's heart means consistently, radically, and very concretely to announce and reveal that God is love and only love, and that every time fear, isolation, or despair begin to invade the human soul this is not something that comes from God." (Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (Spring Valley: NY: Crossroad), 25.)

question: “Who touched me?” He actually gave the woman an opportunity to be seen and heard—two human-affirming actions that hadn’t happened for over a decade. Let’s listen in:

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.” (Luke 8:47–48, NIV)

Once again, a person who went unnoticed by others couldn’t escape being noticed by the Caller. Asking a question of this woman acknowledged her presence and her value as a human being, but Jesus didn’t stop there. When he called her “daughter” in front of the crowd, he publicly established her identity as God’s beloved child. Jesus restored her dignity and worth as a person. This call led to a healing no one else could offer; now the woman could live in the peace of Christ and in community with others.

Since three is a good, biblical number, let’s explore one more example of calling. This person may well have shown up on your “top ten” list—it’s Peter. First, Jesus called this unforgettable man to become a disciple (Mark 1:16–18), the training for which lasted about three years. During that time of non-stop experiential education, Jesus called Peter out more than once. Public correction and rebuke are awkward at best, but, to his credit, Peter kept learning from his rabbi.

For those of us who think our calling (and our lives) would be easier to navigate if we experienced an unmistakable sign from God, we might benefit from rereading the Gospels and rethinking our assumption. Peter witnessed miracle upon miracle: the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, a young girl, and the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5). He was in and out of his fishing boat for several inexplicable phenomena: Jesus' walking on the water; Jesus' calming a bad storm; Jesus' giving surprising fishing advice that resulted in a haul that required extra nets. Then there's the conversation Peter witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration—surely seeing Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus would solidify Peter's faith and purpose in ministry. And yet . . . when pressured, Peter denied knowing or associating with Jesus in the high priest's courtyard (Mark 14:66–72).

Possibly one of the most tender reunions in Scripture occurs around a charcoal fire at breakfast time (John 21). After the public spectacle of Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial, Peter and some of his friends returned to fishing for fish. As soon as Peter realized who it was waiting on the shore, he ran straight to Jesus. With Jesus' ascension imminent, we might expect him to deliver some serious marching orders. After all, Jesus appointed Peter as one of the primary leaders of future Christ-followers. Now was the time for explicit directions regarding Peter's call to ministry. Surely Jesus would unfurl a cosmic blueprint and outline strategic, infallible plans for this fisherman's life. Maybe you better sit down in your Lay-Z-Boy recliner and take a deep breath. Instead of clear instructions,

we hear a familiar call, one that prioritized relationship (a mended one) above all else. Jesus asked, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you,” Peter responded.¹⁷

Here it comes—detailed directions for how Peter should live out his calling to ministry:

“Feed my sheep.”

Most people poised to lead a world-changing movement would likely find this mission mandate a tad vague. “Feed my sheep” ranks right up there with “follow that star” (Matt. 2) for directions sorely lacking in specificity. However, as we watch Peter live out his calling, we witness the Holy Spirit giving him just enough direction at just the right time. Visions, visits to Gentile leaders, speeches to and correction from official councils—all these life experiences formed Peter and the call on his life. I wonder if, after retracing God’s steps with Peter, the woman with the issue of blood, and Hagar, we can loosen our grip, just a bit, on our expectation of an unambiguous, you-can’t-miss-it ministry path. God calls women and men first to himself, but over time he gives clarity of purpose through a single encounter or a lifelong journey.

CONCLUSION

This relationship-affirming pattern holds true throughout the Old and New Testaments. God’s track record is

17. This three-time call-and-response mirrors and repairs the three denials made earlier around another charcoal fire.

indisputable; there are no hidden motives or unspoken expectations. God is not a “spam risk” that contacts us randomly without any understanding of, or respect for who we are. God’s call to us is personal, intentional, and life-giving. Throughout Scripture, God greeted men and women, often engaging them with critical questions, such as, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9, NIV), “Whom shall I send: And who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8, NIV) or, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4, NIV). Then God reminded his beloved creations who they were; to whom they belonged; and what they could become as God’s daughters and sons. Knowing more about the nature of the Caller through these biblical encounters can increase our responsiveness to, as well as our trust in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Whether alone in the desert, crowded in a town, or seated by a campfire, we first receive a call from our Creator to return to the covenant relationship God lovingly initiated. Secondly, we may be tasked with a specific job to do for a defined period, or we may be released to serve others as opportunities arise that match our gifts and experiences. Regardless of the *form* God’s call to ministry takes, the *relationship* empowering that call warrants our primary and ongoing attention. We can take heart and take the next steps on our journey because we didn’t incessantly wonder, *What am I supposed to do?* Instead, we remembered our phone etiquette and followed up with the right question: *May I ask who’s calling, please?*

GOING DEEPER

Many of us spend a lot of time focusing on what we are called to do and less time on Jesus, the person doing the calling. How do you understand God's character based on your personal encounters with him and those you see in scripture?

How would you answer the question: Who are you and what is your purpose in this world?

Calling is all about our relationship, our relationship with God, and our relationship with others. Who is someone who can journey with you as you deepen your relationship with Christ and discover ways you can serve?

Voice: First Lieutenant Melissa Hale

Chaplain, US Air Force

MDiv, Asbury Seminary, 2017

DMin, Asbury Seminary, graduating 2023

Growing up, First Lieutenant Melissa Hale was certain she was going to be an international missionary. She accepted Christ at age twelve and began preaching at age fifteen. By nineteen, she was serving as an associate pastor of a church plant. But in college, she realized God was calling her to join the United States Air Force as a chaplain. Today, she serves approximately 1,800 airmen of the 911 AW/HC at the Pittsburgh Air Reserve Station.

“Even here in the States the Lord has opened up windows to make global impact,” Melissa said. “When you think of the military, I would think of campaigns, a lot of other things, and Americans, but it’s been really interesting to see how many encounters I’ve had with naturalized citizens.”

Melissa found her calling by accident. In college, she spent one summer in the Army ROTC as a cadet. As Melissa formed relationships, the other female cadets sought her out for advice and spiritual leadership. Melissa’s calling solidified when one of her fellow cadets called her name during swim training. During this drill, cadets are

required to dive into ten feet of water in full gear, remove all gear in the water, and wade to shore. But this woman was afraid of heights.

“This young lady was scary, and always in fights, but I learned that day that she was afraid of heights, the dark, and water,” Melissa said. “On the diving board, she called my name, and I was encouraging her to make the jump.”

At that point, Melissa felt that God was inviting her to take her own leap of faith and serve those in the armed forces. She started the Air Force Chaplain Candidacy program in 2015. The program is like an internship and is ideal for seminary and other students to evaluate their compatibility as an Air Force Chaplain. Melissa spent thirty-five days each summer with the Air Force to complete her training and was commissioned as a chaplain in 2019. Each month she reports for duty at her base in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but she is always available to the airmen.

Each day, she has conversations with many people, but as she recounts these interactions, one stands out. As she was about to leave for the day, a young woman in development and training (DTF-Flight) prior to going to basic training stopped by her office for prayer. As they talked, Melissa asked her religious orientation. The woman replied, “I’m not really religious, but I feel like you can connect to that for me.” Melissa believes that her role is to help people see her relationship with God and find hope that they, too, can have a relationship.

“We are to be visible reminders of the holy, which means that we are to be everyone’s pastor, even people who do not believe or have a faith orientation,” she said. “We

are to advocate for their spiritual rights—for their right to worship or not to worship.”

Although the Air Force is a pluralistic setting, with people of all or no faith, Melissa preaches the gospel daily. Not only does she serve as pastor, confidante, and friend to the airmen, but she also gives spiritual guidance to leadership. Melissa believes that preaching the gospel is a matter of time and space.

For example, if she is preaching at a non-mandatory service, she can preach from her theological inclinations. If she's speaking at a required event, she has to speak from an inclusive point of view.

“I truly believe that in the space that I'm offering for people to think beyond what is temporal, I am ultimately preaching the gospel,” she said. “A lot of people in the Air Force are eighteen to twenty-five and have had no chance to think about the intangibles. This gives them the opportunity to understand first and foremost that there is a benevolent divinity. Opening their minds to that idea is planting the seed of the gospel.”

Melissa graduated from Asbury Seminary with her MDiv in 2017 and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in the spiritual direction cohort. She and her husband, William, and their three boys, Logan, Kaleb, and Malcolm, live in Richmond, Kentucky. As of September 2020, she is an Itinerant Deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She also serves on the ministerial staff of Embury Chapel AME in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and alongside her husband at Saint Paul AME in Versailles, Kentucky.

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CHAPTER 5

Called to Missions

Dr. W. Jay Moon¹⁸

Hot coffee trickled in the background as I got ready to go to my college class. The news blared on the TV, but I did not pay attention. Suddenly, I realized they were talking about Africa, and I snapped alert.

“Three thousand people a day are dying in Ethiopia,” the anchor explained, as video footage of desolation and despair flashed across the screen.

I was floored. I knew that the drought in Ethiopia during the 1980s was bad, but I had no idea the extent of the suffering. I was attending Virginia Tech to study civil engineering, and I quickly calculated that the magnitude of this loss was comparable to the entire population of my large university being wiped out in a week. This sank into my soul, and it was hard to shake.

I turned to God with a mixture of guilt and bewilderment, and asked, “Why am I comfortable at school

18. Portions of this chapter are adapted from: Jay W. Moon, *Ordinary Missionary: A Narrative Approach to Introducing World Missions* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2012).

learning and growing while others around the world are simply struggling to survive? This does not seem fair, God.”

I talked to my pastor, and we found some guidance from Luke 12:48: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (NIV).

Instead of feeling guilty about the blessings that God had given me (such as an opportunity for education), Jesus’ words reminded me that this education was not for me alone. It had been entrusted to me to use for God’s glory.

I didn’t always ask questions like this. Throughout my first year of college, I was oblivious to the working of God around the world. In my sophomore year, though, I found some Christian groups on campus (or did they find me?), and I was forever changed. It was a breath of fresh air from the other activities I had participated in during my freshman year. Hungry to learn, I eagerly listened as they discussed God’s heart for the world. For the first time, it seemed, I was hearing God’s heart for mission from Genesis all the way through Revelation.

EXAMPLES OF OTHERS

I also noticed others living this out before me. For example, there was Oscar, a student who set up a hot dog stand in the lobby of the dorm on Sunday and Monday nights. Hordes of addicted football fans would take a break from the TV long enough to devour dozens of hot dogs. Oscar (a nickname given him based on his favorite hot

dog brand, Oscar Meyer) had one simple and advertised motive. He was raising money for World Vision to aid in the suffering of those in Ethiopia.

In these Christian groups, they talked about taking summer trips to places like Haiti. Unlike the college students traveling to Daytona Beach, I felt like this trip was purposeful and meaningful. Praying for God to direct me, a Christian friend offered me the opportunity to help with a sanitation project in Haiti. Tim's enthusiasm was so contagious, so compelling, and so life-giving that I found myself unable to resist.

The short trip lasted about a week, but the effects were life changing. Sleeping on the concrete floor at the orphanage, we awoke to the sound of kids running around us, curious to know us. Daily we surveyed the grounds, gathering data that would be used for a desperately needed design for a sanitary system. On a couple of occasions, I met with missionaries who had dedicated their lives to living in Haiti. I was surprised to find that these people were not "super saints" like Billy Graham. They were like me—normal, ordinary people who had felt and obeyed God's calling on their lives.

I realized for the first time that I didn't have to choose between engineering and spiritual ministry because God could be glorified through both. My body had two hands, why not offer two sides of ministry—spiritual and physical?

During the Haiti trip, I increasingly felt God nudge me to consider further mission service. Sometimes, I felt

this nudge during times of prayer. Other times, it came upon me unexpectedly.

On a long bus ride, one of the other guys on the Haiti trip looked straight at me and said, “Jay, I can see that this energizes you. You should consider further mission service.”

ENGINEERING AND MISSIONS?

Back at Virginia Tech, a professor commented one day in class, “Eighty percent of the diseases of the world are caused by inadequate water and sanitation. If you want to make a difference in the world, sanitary engineering is more crucial than medicine.” Like a heat-seeking missile locked in on its target, this hit home.

Taking a step of faith, I shifted my focus at Virginia Tech to sanitary engineering, which focuses on water and sanitation. Engineers do not normally take classes in topics like world hunger, New Testament, gods and rituals, and the economics of sharing, but I filled all my electives with the classes that I hoped would prepare me.

But I needed to know if this was just a phase that I was going through or if this was a legitimate call of God. I started to fast and pray once a week. Instead of eating lunch, I spent that time praying and asking God to either further increase or decrease my desire for mission. Instead of looking at fasting as gaining favor in God’s eyes, I realized that fasting with prayer is really a way to tune out the daily chatter so I can listen as God speaks to my heart.

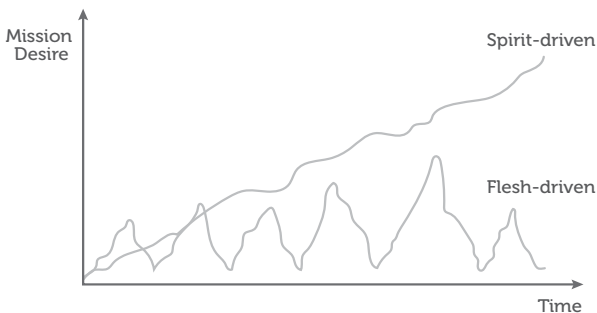
The problem was that some days I was very excited for missions. When I read magazines from mission agencies,

talked with missionaries, and prayed, I felt encouraged to take further steps. Some days, though, I had nagging fears about my own inadequacy.

“Am I able to handle this for a long period of time? What about health issues? What about finding a wife (gulp) who is willing to be a part of this crazy idea?” I pondered.

GOD’S INNER WORK

Psalm 37:4 arrived like a package sent from heaven, “Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart” (ESV). If I put God’s desire first, then God promises to gradually change the desires of my heart to conform with his desires. In the end, I can trust the heart desires that God places there and follow those. Through the following months, I recognized that God was growing the desires in my heart for missions. Sure, there were days of doubt, but these were more erratic due to my immediate circumstances. The long-term trend was a nagging, nudging conviction that God’s intent for me is to be engaged in mission service. If plotted on a chart (something engineers like to do), it would look like this:



Notice the bottom line jumps up and down, indicating these are desires of the flesh. Since they are more volatile, they can deceive and should not be trusted. On the other hand, the upper line has a long-term trend upward. While there are some dips and spikes, they are not nearly as wide as the desires of the flesh. This long-term trend is trustworthy. It indicates the way God changes a heart's desire to conform to God's own desire.

These heart desires gave me direction for the next step to take. Missiologist Scott Moreu¹⁹ notes, "For most of us, God does not lay out the entire life plan in a single call. Rather, he leads step-by-step along the way." While there were more preparations to come, at least I could see the headlights pointing to the road ahead. That was enough to take one more step.

What about the drought in Ethiopia? About six years later, my wife (I did find a woman willing to go to Africa with me) and I were appointed to Ethiopia as full-time missionaries to help with water development and church planting. As we prepared, packed, and planned for Ethiopia, God's call took another surprising turn.

RESISTANCE

As soon as I told people that I was considering mission service in a foreign land, well-intended family and friends were eager to talk about snakes, bugs, sickness, political

19. Scott Moreau, Gary Corwin, and Gary McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 170.

instability, and, “What about all of the things that the children will miss?” Telling people that I wanted to be a missionary in a foreign land always met with a response—but it was not always positive.

As I neared graduation with a BS in Civil Engineering, the department dean was not pleased with my decision to pursue water development in a mission setting. After he listened to my plans post-graduation, he looked at me with astonishment and replied, “You will waste yourself there.”

He reasoned that his graduates have a lot to offer as professional engineers in a consulting firm closer to home. I pondered, *Why is it a waste to spend my life caring for those without clean water to drink?* I wondered which path was more wasteful, one where I made lots of dollars and fought to the top of my firm, or one where I cared for others, and maybe even saved the life of one person from an eternity of suffering. To me, this wasn’t a question. But still, it hurt to hear these comments from those that I respected.

FEAR AND FAITH

After we shared our plans at a church group one morning, a lady marched up to me and warned, “I watched the pictures of where you plan to go. You can’t go there. Your kids will die!”

If anything could have dissuaded me from going to Africa, it was the thought of putting my family in danger. Others tried to dismiss her and reassured me that she did not know what she was talking about, but still, her words hurt. I wondered, *Was this a word from God to me? Was I*

being naïve about this whole thing? Should I be playing it safe after all?

I agonized over these questions. This blow hit deep—there was nothing more precious to me than my wife, Pam, and our children. They were only a few years old—was it unfair (or even worse, selfish of me) to put them in harm’s way?

I started fasting again. It was funny how focused I became when I’m without food. I gradually realized that when God spoke a word, it increased my faith, but when the word came from the enemy, it only increased my fear. I finally concluded that this lady’s advice was not a word from God; rather, it was another well-intentioned person offering safe advice.

FAMILY ADVICE

My parents didn’t take the news well, either. They wanted the best for me. They simply did not imagine that the best plan for my life included living in a village with no electricity on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

“Perhaps, you are being a bit too radical with this,” they warned at first. “Why not live a more ordinary life?”

They probably thought that this was just another stage that I was going through, like the stage when I acted out in school by throwing firecrackers on the bus and drilling a hole in a student’s notebook. (I can still see the puzzled look on my dad’s face when I tried to explain that one).

“Maybe Jay will come to his senses and forget these funny notions,” they reasoned. While I respected my

parents greatly, I knew inside of me that God was stirring something deeper than “playing it safe.”

There were times when I asked myself, *Am I crazy? Am I insane that I want to do this?*

This forced me to earnestly pray and seek God’s direction for our family. In the end, I realized that the well-intentioned advice for our safety was put there for a reason. It forced me to consider the call of God and the consequences of that decision. This produced a conviction that was stronger than the doubts.

Someone asked me, “Are you afraid to live in a village with no electricity and learn a language that is not yet written down?”

I responded, “Yes, I am scared to death. But I know this is God’s call for our lives, and I would be more brokenhearted to miss that call than to play it safe.” This was not about being super-spiritual; it was just about being honest with the tugging on my heart.

JOURNEY PROCESS

This process served a vital role in our journey. Amidst various trials, sickness, and doubts, the same struggle for safety resurfaced. During those times, I came back to the conviction of God’s call. As one missionary wisely suggested, “Do not doubt in the dark what you know to be true in the light.”

Over time, my parents come to recognize that this was God’s call upon our lives—even if that meant we were taking their only grandchildren far away from home. My parents later found their own faith renewed as they witnessed

God's provision for us time and again. They even came to visit us in Africa twice and returned with a passion for mission themselves.

The doubters' hammer forged a hardened conviction on the anvil of my soul. I would later lean upon this hardened conviction to guide us through the dark times ahead. Perhaps, that was why God allowed doubts to come. When difficulties arose (as they will in any significant work of God), the steady conviction that was formed through the years of doubt provided an anchor to continue in ministry. Even more importantly, this process taught me how to listen to God's voice amidst the cacophony of other voices.

URNS IN THE ROAD

Fast forward nine years, and I sensed another turn in the road. In those nine years, we saw God provide for our family of six as we served among the Builsa people in Ghana, West Africa. In addition, we witnessed the Holy Spirit do an amazing work in these villages—and we had a front seat. Not because of us (and often despite us), we participated in a church-planting movement of twenty-five churches as well as over one hundred hand-dug wells (yes, that means a pick and shovel and not a drilling machine) scattered throughout villages. This was the most rewarding time in my life and the most challenging.

All along the way, I had taught Builsa leaders about indigenous approaches to church planting. Now, others are saying to me, "You should teach more people to do church planting and community development—just like you are doing here." Missiologist Ralph Winter once put

it something like this, “You can be a fireman and put out fifty fires a year *or* you can train one hundred firemen to each put out fifty fires.”²⁰

The process of being strategic and discerning God’s will continued. As I spent time in prayer (sometimes with fasting), read the Bible, talked with professors/ministry leaders/fellow missionaries/indigenous pastors, and tested the teaching gift, people eventually directed me to the seminary with the best missiologists in the world—Asbury Theological Seminary. One missionary leader put it this way. “The sharper the knife, the stronger the cut.” The program at Asbury Seminary not only sharpened my knife for more effective ministry, it also opened doors that I could not even see at the moment. All the while, God delighted my soul.

I yearned to return to ministry in Africa but also realized that my children were now close to entering college, and a door opened to teach missiology at a seminary in Sioux Falls, SD. In short, they offered me a position to teach one hundred firemen (every year) to put out fifty fires! While I did not plan this route ahead of time, I can look back and connect the dots to see God’s wisdom in the experiences and steps of faith along the way. Without my being fully aware of it at the time, all these micro decisions and steps can be described as a long obedience in the same direction.²¹

20. R. D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

21. Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000).

CO-VOCATIONAL MINISTRY

Along the journey, I kept wondering how God would use these other skills that have been sharpened for ministry. What about the desires for engineering and business startups—could that also be a desire that God placed in my heart, like the one referred to in Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart” (ESV)? The problem was that most of the people that I talked with said to pick one or the other—sacred ministry or secular work. What about doing both, such as co-vocational ministry?

Previously, the term “bi-vocational” was used to describe a pastor who worked a secular job outside the church. The implication was that this “other job” was:

1. Secular work and not really “ministry.”
2. Not the pastor’s vocational preference.
3. Simply temporary until the church could afford a full salary. Once the church could afford a full salary, however, then the pastor would leave their secular job and work full-time for the church.

The term “co-vocational” challenged these three assumptions. Instead of regarding this as a secular job, what if the job outside the church provided a network of relationships and contexts for sacred ministry? In addition, what if this was not simply a “second-best” temporary job but it provided value for the community by using the pastor’s skills? Co-vocational pastors choose to continue to work outside the church due to missional reasons even when the church

can afford a full salary.²² In this way, the church can be more generous to serve the community as well as create relational networks through the pastor's job.²³ In short, the job outside the church is considered sacred, the pastor's choice, and long term as opposed to simply secular, not of their choosing, and short term.

SACRED AND SECULAR

As I once again connected the dots, I could see how God created these desires for engineering and business that coincided with my missional calling. In short, I could minister to students during the week and minister to those outside the seminary bubble during the weekend through these co-vocational venues. Like the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, I realized that God is pleased when we use ALL of our talents in obedience to God.

What if we realized that every venue could become sacred space, whether it is preaching behind a pulpit, teaching in a seminary classroom, or building a treehouse in the forest for Airbnb guests? After staying in our luxury

22. Send Institute commissioned a survey of bi-vocational pastors in 2018 and found that “41% indicated that being bi-vocational was integral to a long-term ministry strategy,” indicating that they were co-vocational. See Daniel Yang, “Convergence of Vocation: A Co-Vocational Primer for Church Planting Networks” *Send Institute* (February 2019), <https://www.sendinstitute.org/covocational-primer/>.

23. Brian Briscoe, *Convocational Church Planting: Aligning Your Marketplace Calling and the Mission of God* (Alpharetta, GA: Send, 2018).

treehouse²⁴ recently, a young lady wrote, “My husband and I came to your treehouse this weekend, and we fell in love with each other again!” That sure sounds like sacred ministry to me.

Even more of a surprise perhaps, I learned that my co-vocational calling equipped me even better for ministry. Let me explain. I teach evangelism and church planting at the best missiology school in the world. As a result, I am around Christians all day, which I love. My co-vocational calling, though, offers me contact with those outside the Christian bubble so that I engage “not-yet believers” every week. When they first encounter me as an engineer or businessperson, a relationship forms that is different if they encounter me first as a missionary or seminary professor. As I listen to these customers’ concerns and needs, a relationship forms that often leads to discussions of spiritual matters. It is not uncommon for me to pray with people at the end of these business discussions that have turned into informal counseling sessions. These interactions in my co-vocational calling then inform how I teach evangelism and church planting to students at the seminary.

CONCLUSION

This may be a shocker, but I wonder if God is not as concerned about what we do as much as God is concerned

24. The three treehouses are in the Red River Gorge situated in the Daniel Boone National Forest. They include a hot shower, toilet, kitchenette, etc. See www.rgelevatecabins.com. To encourage pastors to get refreshed and revitalized in their calling, they receive a 50 percent discount on Monday nights.

about how we do it. Stated another way, God desires your obedience resulting in Christlike growth—and God can instill in you various desires and skills so that your calling can be fulfilled in a multitude of roles. These roles might vary throughout your life. You might be in a village planting churches, behind a pulpit preaching, in a farm tending cattle, in a treehouse welcoming guests, in a classroom teaching students . . . you name it! Each of these can be sacred spaces where the Holy Spirit intersects your life with others for holy moments. I am convinced this is true since I have experienced it.

As you discern God’s calling for your life, I suggest the following points to remember, along with questions to honestly ask yourself, others, and God:

1. *Delight yourself in the Lord.* Cultivate a deep inner dependence upon God and a lifestyle that is willing to obey where God sends you. God may send you to Africa or to a “secular” business closer to home. God is more interested in transforming you as you take faith steps in response to God’s calling.

Set aside time and ask, *What habits are most life-giving that allow me to experience God’s delight? How can I create time and space to cultivate a deeper inner life that experiences God’s delight?*

2. *Listen to the desires that God places in you.* As you read the Bible, pray, and fast, listen for the desires that God places deep inside. These desires will steadily grow so that you can detect them amidst the desires of the flesh that wax and wane. Tend to these desires like a well-tended

garden—pull out the weeds that distract and fertilize those where you sense God’s joy.

Ask yourself, *What distractions need to be removed so that I can recognize God’s desires in my life? What desires come from God that are increasing?*

3. *Do not despise small steps of obedience.* The daily steps that you take may seem small and insignificant; however, these shape the long-term direction of your life. Step out in faith and try out the giftings that God has given. The leader of the FCA group in college, nicknamed Bad-ticket (that is a story for another day!), asked me to lead the FCA group as we visited youth in a juvenile detention center. Not sure why he chose me but not wanting to let him down, I prepared my best to have something to offer them. I am not saying it was the best teaching experience, but it seemed to connect with the youth. Even more, this gave me confidence to take another step after college when I volunteered to teach at a drug and alcohol abuse center on Sundays once a month. This stretched me in ways that I could not imagine, but it also taught me lifelong lessons, all the while affirming some gifting and giving me the confidence to take the next step in faith.

Ask yourself, *What is the next small step that God is calling me to?* Then, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you the courage to put one foot in front of the other.

4. *Be a conduit and not a cul-de-sac of God’s blessings.* Recognize that God has gifted you to bless others, just like God did with Abraham in Genesis 13. Whatever talent you have been given, your role is to steward all these gifts and not bury any one of them. We best steward these gifts

as we bless others. As we bless others, the amazing result is that they multiply like fish and loaves *as* they are being distributed. Look for clues of God's presence in your daily mundane work, and you will find moments of God's transforming power as you step up and care for others.

Ask yourself, *What has God put in my hand that is meant for blessing others?* As you bless others, look for God to provide the next step so you experience the multiplying effect.

5. *Be willing to move.* Do not limit God's work to a particular location, even if it is your preferred location. I feel that God is less concerned about the stadium you are playing in than the team you are playing with. In other words, the location is not as important as the ministry team. We intended to go to Ethiopia with SIM. For two and a half years, we raised support, packed, prepared, etc. Just as we were ready to go, a war broke out and the Ethiopian airport closed. We were all dressed up, but there was no party to go to! We simply went back to the mission and said, "We are still ready to go. Where else could you use our family to do church planting and water development?" We were redirected to Ghana, West Africa.

I have since learned that this is not uncommon—David Livingstone was headed for China, and he ended up in East Africa (it reminds me of a friend in high school who was driving from Baltimore to Florida, but he took a wrong turn on the Baltimore beltway and ended up in California!). All of this to say, do not limit God's will to a geographical location. Be willing to go where God calls.

By the way, we later learned that SIM missionaries joked that the acronym SIM really stands for “Sure, I’ll Move!”

Ask yourself, *If I were not confining God’s will to a geographical location, what would God’s will look like for me and my family?*

6. *Seek the counsel of others.* Listen to others who know you well and have observed you in various contexts. They may point out your blind spots and offer caution. In addition, they may provide affirmation and direction. Prior to becoming a missionary, I had plenty of doubts about whether I was “good enough” for full-time ministry. We were meeting with my pastor weekly to discuss hermeneutics, and he said to both Pam and me, “You have what it takes to be good missionaries.” Like water soaking into a dry sponge, this affirmation from someone we respected and trusted filled me with confidence that I did not have on my own. If God wanted to give an embrace to assure us to continue this ministry path, this arrived in the form of Pastor Sandy’s words. While not everyone will be encouraging, consider their counsel as an opportunity to drive your soul into the heart of God.

As you share your ministry aspirations/dreams/musings with others, ask them, “What can you affirm and what cautions do you have?” As you listen to the counsel of others, reflect upon how this resonates with how God has been directing the desires of your heart in other areas.

7. *Don’t allow fear to cripple you.* Fear is an emotion like happiness and sadness. Receive it as an emotion and not as a straitjacket. In short, do not let fear stifle your obedience. I have learned over the years that the following

combination of emotions is a ripe environment for God to do a transforming work—fear in the situation mixed with excitement about what God could do. That’s right. This combination is where I have seen God’s missional moments most evident. This is exactly how I felt walking into that juvenile detention center in college, stepping on the plane bound for Africa the first time, adjusting my tie as I entered the classroom to teach seminary students the first time, spending money to build a treehouse that no one could picture yet—you get the picture. Don’t wait for the fear to subside prior to acting. If you do, you will miss the missional moment that God wants to reveal.

When faced with the combination of fear and excitement about what God might do, ask yourself, *If I were to be a courageous version of myself and not simply the ordinary me, how would I act?*

8. *Consider co-vocational callings.* There is no secular work—unless you make it that way! Particularly in the secularizing North American context where young folks are less attracted to church, we need to consider how to best reach people who are outside the church walls. Serving co-vocational roles provides a missional venue to reach them and engage them in meaningful relationships in the marketplace. Here is what I have observed: when I do good ethical business with others that provides legitimate value for them, it forms a relationship that brings them one step closer to Jesus. Billy Graham once said, “I believe that one of the next great moves of God is going to be through the believers in the workplace.” Craig Avery states it this way, “If Christians in the marketplace could

be awakened to their missional role, we could change the world!”²⁵ I believe him.

Ask yourself, *If God were to show up at my work today, what would it look like? How can I perceive God’s presence in my work and cooperate with it?* I have noticed that simple things, such as encouraging others at work, make people pause and take note. Since many workers are often focused on themselves and their advancement, when you take the time to notice the goodness in others, it demonstrates something of God that is in short supply in the marketplace. As you notice God’s presence in your workplace (you may need to look harder in some places), take steps to cooperate with God’s calling there.

25. Craig is so passionate about missional callings in the marketplace that he formed the 210 Leaders (based on Eph. 2:10) in Lexington, Kentucky, where marketplace groups gather every two weeks to discuss faith and work issues. To find out more, or to join a 210 group, see www.210leaders.com.

GOING DEEPER

We are called to love others whether we are engineers or pastors. How can you use your education or resources to help others right now?

Psalm 37:4 says: “Delight yourself in the *Lord* and he will give you the desires of your heart.” How have you seen God conform your desires to match his heart?

If you have followed God for any length of time, you have encountered difficulties. How have you seen God’s faithfulness during adversities?

Voice: Mike and Myra Watkins

*Missionaries with Every Nation in
Central and Eastern Europe
MA in Intercultural Studies, Asbury Seminary, 2019*

Mike and Myra Watkins studied at different universities in North Carolina, but they shared a lifelong passion for what was, at the time, the Soviet Union. The couple moved to Lviv, Ukraine, in 1993 to reach the Slavic people for Christ through church planting, working with people and leaders who would later become part of Every Nation. Today, Mike and Myra serve with the European regional team in a developing area of Central and Eastern Europe, offering training, coaching, and consulting for churches and new church planters.

“We often say that church planting doesn’t get you up in the morning because it’s not the work of church planting, but it’s about Jesus Christ and his mission to seek and save the lost,” Myra said. “It’s about the mission to make disciples and that’s what is always connected to our relationship with God and our love for people. It’s never about the business of church planting for us, even though that’s the result.”

They originally planned to serve in Moscow, but due to previously built relationships they found Ukraine more receptive to the gospel at the time. In 1993 the

couple began the process of planting a church in Ukraine. Although the Slavic people are typecast as being cold and reserved compared to Western culture, it's a way of cultural security. Those in the West, especially Americans, are often very friendly, without intending to truly befriend. In Slavic culture, once you're invited over for dinner, you're part of the family.

During the openness of reconstruction, the Watkins found a receptive, resilient community. Without cell phones, computers, or email, they relied on relationships for everything. Four hundred people came to their first evangelistic outreach and thirty of those formed the core group of the plant. Christian international students from Nigeria, Mexico, and Ghana came alongside because they believed God had asked them to help them plant the church.

In 2003, they returned to the States to serve at Beth Shalom, a Russian church in Brooklyn, New York, until 2004. Afterward they served for a few years in the Philippines before re-deploying to Kiev, Ukraine, in 2007, to start a second church plant, develop national leaders for churches, and teach university students. However, unexpected difficulties in their social justice endeavors led to a return to the US. During that time, they both decided to continue their education with a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies at Asbury Seminary.

“We needed longevity to see churches become established and grow with national leaders,” Mike said, “so it was time to diversify and train the next generation. We had an innate sense of cross-cultural thinking but lacked

the academic muscle. The program was tailor-made for us, and we greatly benefited because most of the cohort members were senior pastors of indigenous churches.”

“As literally the first generation of missionaries in our movement, we didn’t have anyone ahead of us who could tell us what we were running into as far as the missionary experience,” Myra said. “We could not fully understand the reason for the suffering and the difficulties, but now we see it more clearly as we mentor the younger generation. We’re not trying to keep them from difficulty, but we’re helping them establish good foundations for dealing with it.”

Myra also teaches a course for Every Nation’s global leadership curriculum on social responsibility that covers the biblical foundations, historical perspective, and current practice.

“So I think that’s qualitatively what we learned in our spiritual formation class at the seminary,” Mike said. “One of the last phases of your ministry life is that you end up ministering who you are, not what you want to do, but you minister that thing that you have become. And that’s a comfortable place to be.”

Both Mike and Myra graduated with an MA in Intercultural Studies in 2019. In the fall of 2021, Myra plans to begin a PhD in Intercultural Studies and return to Central Europe, this time to Prague, Czech Republic, where they will lead a church plant and continue to serve the global church.

CHAPTER 6

Called to the Baptized Life of Discipleship

Dr. Jonathan A. Powers

As Christians, every one of us is called to the baptized life of discipleship. Since discipleship is all about following Jesus and being made more like him, the call to the life of discipleship is nothing less than learning how to live into and live out one's baptism. The two are two sides of the same coin. Baptism initiates discipleship, and discipleship is the constant process of being converted into what baptism represents, i.e., unity with Jesus Christ. The baptized life of discipleship is therefore the constant, pervasive, underlying call of every Christian. We are to be made in the likeness of Jesus.

BAPTISM AS UNITY WITH CHRIST

Joined with Christ in the waters that he once and for all sanctified, baptism is the sacramental act of initiation and conversion into the life and death of Jesus Christ. The person and work of Jesus, and the meaning of his death and

resurrection are the principal emphases of the rite. The apostle Paul claims as much in Romans 6:3–4:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (NKJV)

In this passage, Paul argues that the act of baptism exemplifies and embodies a reality that gives perspective to the entirety of the Christian life—unity with Christ. Equally, baptism makes serious claims about the Christian approach to death. On the one hand, baptism is indicative of the physical death and the new, resurrected life the Christian will one day experience in the corporeal body. Baptism serves as a reminder to the Christian that death is prevalent and will one day claim every single person. However, baptism also offers comfort, acknowledging that death does not have the final word. Since the Christian has been united with Christ in his death, they will also be united with him in his resurrection. Every Christian funeral is thus representative of baptism. The deceased person is identified as one who has now entered the fullness of their baptism. They have reached complete union with Christ, who has accepted them into his death to be purified, healed, and freed of death itself. Likewise, the Christian has joined Christ in new, resurrected life, following in death and resurrection where Christ first led.

On the other hand, baptism signifies a spiritual death and life—death to sin and the reality of new life known in Christ. It is indicative of the saving work of Christ in the present moment. While the act of baptism itself is not salvific, its proper observance places an individual in a context where salvation is realized and actualized, namely relationship to Jesus Christ and Christ’s mystical body, the church. Therefore, baptism is the starting point on the road to salvation because it calls the Christian to enter a life of discipleship. Accordingly, baptism is not just a past event, but also a future-oriented reality that points to God’s work of salvation through grace, a salvation that both saves from future damnation and saves “to the uttermost” in the here and now, continually freeing the Christian from the guilt and power of sin. When we as Christians make use of the grace of God initiated in baptism, we find ourselves converting from a life of sin to a life of holy love. Such growth in grace and love persists throughout the entirety of the Christian life, leading us on to perfection in Christlikeness. Baptism thus functions alongside discipleship in the Christian life as an effective sign of salvation, an effective means of grace, and an effective pledge of the glory to come.

Paul’s association of baptism with Christ’s death and resurrection in Romans 6 presents baptism as the act by which new spiritual life is drawn. It also proclaims the calling of every baptized Christian—to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Through faith, the baptized person is “engrafted” into Christ, and through the Spirit

“fashioned” into Christlikeness.²⁶ This union with Christ in baptism has a specific consequence: walking in newness of life. Baptism therefore is representative not only of a future, resurrected reality but also of the present and active commitment to Christ showcased through Christlike (i.e., holy) living. The disciple gradually grows in holiness until perfected in love. To put it another way, the sacrament of baptism initiates what discipleship develops and preserves: a life of saving faith and holy love.

DISCIPLESHIP AS GROWTH IN CHRISTLIKENESS

Throughout his life, John Wesley taught that holiness is the standard for every Christian disciple. This teaching is exemplified in his sermon “Of the Church” as he reflects on the reason why the church is called “the *holy* catholic church” in the Apostles’ Creed. Wesley writes: “The church is called ‘holy’ because it is holy; because every member thereof is holy, though in different degrees, as he that called them is holy.”²⁷ In this statement, Wesley affirms that the holy character of the church is directly correlated to the holiness of those baptized into the church. Simply put, the church is called holy because its members are holy. Holiness describes the character of a baptized disciple.

26. See John Wesley, “Romans 6:3–4,” in *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Salem: Schmuel Publishers, 1976), 376.

27. John Wesley, Sermon 74, “Of the Church,” in *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3, *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986), 55–56.

Wesley makes an important qualification in his sermon, however, stating that holiness subsists in “different degrees.” While holiness is a defining characteristic of the church and necessary for the Christian life, Wesley recognizes that those who receive God’s gift of grace in baptism must also grow in holiness. To put it another way, while baptism initiates a person into discipleship, holiness of life and love continues to be cultivated throughout the entirety of the disciple’s life. Regardless of whether one is baptized as an infant, adolescent, or adult, the sacrament of baptism is the beginning of the life of holiness that the baptized individual is to pursue for the remainder of his or her life. Just as Jesus grew in wisdom and grace, continual growth is necessary for the disciple. However, such growth only occurs in a pure heart that continues to be nurtured in a life of baptized discipleship.

Since holiness is expected of any baptized Christian, and because Wesley describes perfection and holiness in terms of pure and perfect love, perfection and holiness must be understood in a social and relational way. In other words, there is a necessary social and relational feature to discipleship. This is the primary principle underlying John Wesley’s concept of “social” holiness: holy love needs others to be cultivated and maintained. There is no division between personal and social piety, which is why in his fourth discourse on the Sermon on the Mount Wesley condemns solitary religion, in other words, religion that exists “without living and conversing with other

men.”²⁸ He writes: “Christianity is essentially a social religion; to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it. When I say, this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all, without society.”²⁹ Likewise, in his preface to the 1739 edition of *Sacred Hymns and Poems*, Wesley pens the following words:

“Holy Solitaries” is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than Holy Adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, loves his brother also: And that we manifest our Love, by doing good to all men; especially to them that are of the household of faith. And in truth, whoever loveth his brethren not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be zealous of good works. He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire, of spending and being spent for them.”³⁰

In the above writings, Wesley counters an individualized and privatized notion of the Christian faith by speaking

28. John Wesley, Sermon 24, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, IV,” in *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984), 531–549.

29. *Ibid.*, 534.

30. John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (repr., London: William Strahan, 1739), viii–ix.

to the necessity for Christian fellowship. He sets forth the idea that one cannot know holy love disconnected from other Christians in the church; instead, Christians need one another for the cultivation and maintenance of holiness.

DISCIPLES DISCIPLING DISCIPLES

Discipleship cannot be done in isolation, but rather requires a community. Therefore, baptism must be understood not only as initiation and conversion into life with Christ, but also as initiation into Christ's body—the Church—where continuous conversion into Christlikeness takes place. In his “Treatise on Baptism,” John Wesley calls baptism “the initiatory sacrament,” stating that baptism initiates a person into life with God and into relationship with his Church.³¹ It is situated within these two relationships that a person is disciplined to grow in holiness. Through the regenerative work and grace of God, the holiness of heart and life instigated by baptism is continuously realized and actualized in Christian community. Through the process of discipleship, one discovers what it means to be a baptized Christian—i.e., one who is identified with Christ, who is part of Christ's mystical and ecclesial body, and who is expected to exhibit Christlikeness in the world. The call to the baptized life of discipleship thus requires disciples to invest in other disciples. Jesus himself affirmed

31. John Wesley, “A Treatise on Baptism,” in *Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, *Letters, Essays, Dialogs, Addresses*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 191.

this approach to discipleship in the commission he gave his disciples in Matthew 28:18–20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (NKJV)

Notice Jesus’ instruction in the Matthew 28 passage. While at first it may seem that he issued three directives in his commission—“go,” “baptize,” and “teach”—he in fact offered only one—to *disciple*. The main verb he used (“disciple”) describes the goal of the work he sent his disciples out to do. The participles he applied (“baptizing” and “teaching”) qualify the means his disciples were to use to reach this end. Basically, Jesus’ sole command to his disciples was to go forth and disciple others. How they were to do the discipling was baptizing and teaching, specifically baptizing into the name of the Trinity and teaching obedience to Christ’s commands. Baptism (i.e., initiation into Christ) and education (i.e., growth in Christlikeness) thus play a central role in the disciple-making process.

The way Jesus oriented discipleship in the Matthew 28 commission is noteworthy, especially since he diverged from previous forms of discipleship. In the ancient Jewish context, it was common for rabbis to take on and educate disciples who might in turn become rabbis and pass

down traditions to their own students. The highest hope, honor, and privilege of a student in a rabbinic school was to become a rabbi with one's own disciples to instruct. As new rabbis became teachers for new generations, they began new schools where they would foster their own new disciples. In Matthew 28, however, Jesus initiated a different paradigm. He began by reminding his disciples that he had the ultimate authority; therefore, he was the one, true teacher.

Jesus then commissioned his disciples to go forth, not making disciples of themselves, but making disciples who were identified in the name of the triune God (conferred in baptism) and who were obedient to his commandments (learned through teaching). In doing so, Jesus established himself as the standard of discipleship. In other words, all discipleship points back to him. To be a disciple requires submission to Jesus' authority and to Jesus' teachings. His disciples never take on the role of rabbi themselves. Instead, their status as a disciple is perpetual. Nonetheless, Jesus still empowers his disciples for disciple-making. Jesus introduced not a top-down model, but rather a model whereby discipleship requires disciples investing in one another. His disciples are not broken into separate schools but rather remain united as a body. Discipleship is done communally and takes place within a relational context. Everyone has equal standing as they devote themselves to mutual growth in Christlikeness.

This communal nature of discipleship illumines the final words Jesus spoke to his disciples in Matthew 28. Specifically, Jesus concluded his commission with a promise

that his presence would be with his disciples always, even to very end of the age. Although he did not explicitly name the Church in Matthew 28:20, Jesus' preceding commission implies he will be present with his disciples through a complete and absolute union to his body, the Church. He is the head of the Church, and his presence persists in the world by virtue of his body, i.e., the collective of his disciples who have been baptized into his name, who follow his teachings, who live obedient to his commands, and who thus bear his image to the world. Since Jesus is the perfect one who submitted to baptism to "fulfill all righteousness," his disciples follow him in baptism and conform to his way of righteous living and holy love. United with him in baptism, Jesus' disciples are made part of his body. Within this body of the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, his disciples are transformed into his likeness as they grow in holiness. Thus, our calling as baptized disciples of Jesus is to participate in disciple-making through baptism and catechesis as we extend his representative body on earth, mutually and continually growing in the image of Christ as we follow Christ in life, death, and resurrection.

A MODEL OF COMMUNAL DISCIPLESHIP

One of John Wesley's most enduring legacies was his emphasis on small-group formation. In fact, it has been claimed that Wesley's insistence on small groups was an essential component to the growth of the eighteenth-century British revivals. In the early years of his ministry in England, John Wesley came to the stark realization that

righteous living and holy love did not characterize the baptized Christians he met day-to-day. Furthermore, Wesley discovered that very few of his fellow Christians in the Church of England had a proper understanding of Scripture, theology, and doctrine, much less recognized the significance of their baptism as it pertained to their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Wesley was convinced something needed to be done to spark renewal in the Church of England. He thus assembled a system of small groups and societies as a model of discipleship to incite growth in holiness through smaller, more intimate settings so the early Methodists could learn to “watch over one another in love.”³² Wesley established his system of discipleship through three key structures: the Society Meeting, the Class Meeting, and the Band Meeting. The Societies were structured as a gathering of people from a particular region or parish who met periodically for Bible study, prayer, mutual encouragement, and preaching. Usually, these gatherings were held during the week so members could attend services in their local parish churches. In Societies, leaders taught key Methodist doctrines since one of the aims of the gathering was to present scriptural truth in a clear and compelling manner.

Within the Methodist Societies, smaller groups called Bands and Classes met. Every member of a Society was also a member of a Class Meeting and/or Band Meeting.

32. John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle upon Tyne,” in *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 69.

Classes provided an entry-level experience of discipleship for the early Methodists and were mixed regarding age, spiritual maturity, gender, marital status, and social standing. The primary focus of the Class meeting centered on behavioral change through examination of the state of one's soul and the person's life with God. Growth in love was the ultimate goal of the Class Meeting. Band Meetings, however, were for those who desired to grow in holy life and holy love.

The bands consisted of four to six members of the same sex and social status. In the Band Meeting, members "sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections." Bands committed to the regular confession of sin to grow in Christian perfection. Members were accountable to one another regarding life and sin. They prayed for one other and encouraged one another toward love, good works, and holy living.

THE LIFE BAPTISM DEMANDS

To reaffirm what has been claimed throughout this chapter, there is an indivisible relationship between discipleship and baptism. Specifically, baptism is the sacramental act of initiation and conversion. It instigates what discipleship develops and preserves—a life of saving faith and holy love. However, for holy life and love to persist in disciples, intentional and continual cultivation is needed. If we are to take seriously our call to the baptized life of discipleship, then we need to grow as disciples in the holy life and love that baptism demands.

John Wesley recognized that the grace of God manifest through love for others is essential to the baptized Christian's growth in Christlikeness. Because he understood that disciples grow through pursuit of holiness in community, he established the Band Meeting as an ideal environment for intimate discipleship to take place. It is an exemplary model for Christians today of what it means to live out the baptized life of discipleship. Such devotion of disciples who encourage one another toward growth in Christlikeness has potential to establish relationships that will cultivate a life of holiness. Through mutual care for one other, there is opportunity for us to find ourselves living fully into our calling as baptized disciples, turning away from a life of sin as we grow in holy life and perfect love.

GOING DEEPER

How does baptism represent our unity with Christ?

How is community vital to your growth as a disciple? If you don't have a vibrant community, how can you cultivate one?

As you seek to live out the Great Commission of discipling, how are you experiencing God's presence?

Voice: Dr. Brian Taylor

*Pastor and Church Planter, Bethel Cincinnati Church
Doctor of Ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019*

Brian and Chavonne Taylor planted Bethel Cincinnati Church in an area that was not always welcome to diversity. Now the church is becoming one where it is hard to tell whether it is Black or White, while seeing other ethnicities integrated, too. Their hope is to restore relationships and community in a city plagued by racial challenges.

“My pursuit of racial reconciliation came less out of a sense of the need and more out of a sense of who God’s called me to be in relationship to him,” Brian said. “In any city God called me to work, I would work toward reconciliation.”

Cincinnati has a long history of race riots, its first occurring in 1829, just forty-one years after it was founded. Its most recent riot occurred in 2001, following the shooting of Timothy Thomas, an unarmed Black teenager.

“Racism is like a beach ball that we want to keep under the water’s surface, but it keeps springing up,” Brian said.

Following the attack in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, Brian highlighted the racial diversity and friendships within his church. He asked that the lights be turned up and for individuals to look at their neighbors, to shake hands with their friends. As he looked

out at the congregation, he saw people from many nations represented.

“It’s one thing for people to meet together, but different to eat together,” Brian said. “When that happens, you start hearing narratives that are different from your own. When you have relationships with people from different ethnicities, it makes it hard to label people one way.”

Brian believes that reconciliation starts on a personal level, but then it moves to transform communities.

As a church staff, the team is reading a book regarding multi-ethnic conversations. As a larger group, the church works within the community to provide tutoring and mentoring programs as well as a sports camp for underprivileged children. The church uses these avenues as opportunities to invest life skills in these kids.

“What we have been able to do is put ourselves in a position where we’re rubbing shoulders and serving, tutoring and mentoring in our community,” Brian said. “We’re also going to have a multi-ethnic conversation on the college campuses to think through and process some of those [social justice] questions as well.”

As the church approaches the four-year mark, they are exploring ways to address the systemic issues with city leaders regarding housing and education. They seek to answer the question: How can we be socially responsible as a church where God has placed us, so as not to prioritize one group over the other?

“We’re using the Ephesians 4 model, which talks about equipping the saints for the ministry,” Brian said. “If we’re

empowering people to do God's work throughout their lives, then we're doing the job we're called to do."

Brian has seen changes on an individual, church, and city level. People are better equipped to communicate with others from different cultures and to be more openhanded. As a church, the attendees want to engage different ethnicities within the community without the anger, hate, and violence present in the past.

"When people have committed to Jesus, they don't have the right not to forgive and not to love," Brian said. "Sometimes it's hard to see things from another perspective, and when these kinds of things happen, we feel mad. But we don't get the right not to be a Christian now because it hurts."

CHAPTER 7

Ordinary Calling

Dr. Ruth Anne Reese

There are several famous calling narratives in the Bible. We could begin with Abraham's encounter with the God who spoke a promise of blessing for Abraham's family and the whole world (Gen. 12). Or we might look at the narrative of Moses, who turned aside to see a bush burning without burning up and encountered the Holy God, the great I AM, and was then commissioned to be God's leader for the deliverance of Israel (Ex. 3–4). Or we might think about any number of prophets. Isaiah saw a great vision of God on the throne with his robe filling the temple as he responded to God's call and was commissioned by God for prophetic speech (Is. 6). We might remember Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others. Each one of these leaders had their own unique encounter with God. For many of them, they found that responding to the call of God on their lives was lonely. They might have borne a tremendous burden of leadership like Moses did (Ex. 18), or they might have brought a message from God that people didn't wish to hear (Isa. 6; Jer. 7:27). Repeatedly, God

called men and women into leadership over God's people: many judges and kings, prophets and priests experienced God's call on their lives.

Again, in the New Testament, we encounter dramatic stories of God's calling. We remember Peter and Andrew, James and John leaving their nets and boats and family to follow Jesus (Matt. 4). Or the story of Matthew who was sitting at his tax booth when Jesus came by and simply said, "Follow me.' And he got up and followed him" (Matt. 9:9, NRSV). Then, of course, there is the dramatic story of Saul, the persecutor of the early Christians, who encountered the risen Lord Jesus on the Damascus Road and was transformed. When his blindness was healed, "immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20, NRSV). Paul and the other apostles became great leaders in the early church, traveling across much of the ancient world to proclaim the message about Jesus. God had come to earth in the person of Jesus, demonstrated a holy life and way of living, experienced suffering without sin, died for the sins of the world, was attested by God through the resurrection, and now rules with God. This rule, this peaceable kingdom, would be proclaimed by and recognized in and through the people gathered around the person of Jesus: the Church. This was the message Thomas carried, perhaps as far as India. This was the message other apostles carried with them to Syria, modern-day Russia, and North Africa. This is the message that would turn the world upside down.

And to this day, some people hear a very specific call on their lives from God and some people experience a dramatic call from God to do a certain thing. Yet for every great leader who was called in a dramatic encounter with the living God, there were hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of people who did not see the burning bush or encounter the train of God's robe in the temple. There were Christians who were not called to leave their nets or their business to follow Jesus. Indeed, most Christians remained where they were in the circumstances they already inhabited after they heard and responded to the call of the Good News about Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:17–24; for a narrative see Luke 8:26–39). So what about the ordinary people of Israel? What about ordinary Christians who chose to trust in Jesus? Were they called? And if so, what does a calling look like for them?

WHOM DOES GOD CALL?

First and foremost, God calls sinners (Matt. 9:13). God does not call those who think they have it all together or who exhibit pride or who get their identity by identifying as “spiritual” or “religious” (the “righteous” of Matt. 9:13); rather, God calls those who have the humility to admit their need and condition before God. Part of the good news about Jesus is that “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NRSV). This was God's way of demonstrating love for the whole world, for all of us are sinners. And all of us are called to hear and respond to the good news that Jesus died on the cross and in this way overcame sin and the power of death. We are called to

enter relationship with God through trust in Jesus, God's Son. In 1 Corinthians, Paul says, "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9, NRSV). Here, Paul uses all the titles of Jesus to remind readers to whom they were called. They were called to belong to God's Son (the Son who bears the true image and message of the Father, Heb. 1:1–4) whose name is Jesus. This one is the Christ, the one chosen and anointed by God as the king-priest who would redeem the world. And he is Lord, the one to whom we submit when we enter fellowship with him. When we respond to the call of the Good News on our lives, we enter relationship with the triune God. We grow in faith in God through sharing in partnership with Jesus and experiencing the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. *And* we are joined in brotherly love with all those who have also responded to the call of the gospel on their lives: the Church. Responding in humility to the call of the gospel on our lives moves us from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God. It moves us to familial relationship with the whole people of God, who are called to faithful covenant with God through the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

TO WHAT DOES GOD CALL CHRISTIANS?

When Paul writes to the Ephesian church from prison, he begs them "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1, NRSV). This calling comes after Paul has spent three chapters laying out the way in which the Ephesians have been moved from death

to life through the power of Christ's death and resurrection (Eph. 1:19–20) and the way that God is forming them into a new community (Eph. 2:11–22). God is taking people who were formerly estranged (Jews and Gentiles) and making them into one people through the work of reconciliation (Eph. 2:16). That reconciliation takes place in the body of Jesus on the cross and is recognized in the Church that becomes the people of God, the household of God, and grows into the temple of God, the place where God dwells (Eph. 2:19–22). No matter what task God may call Christians to, that calling takes place within the Church (the great nation, the great people, the great family, the great temple of God).³³

Paul goes on to specify the contours of a life worthy of God's calling. He writes, "lead a life worthy of the calling . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." When Paul gets down to the details of our calling, he begins with several different virtues. In other words, he doesn't begin by listing out a job description. Instead, he calls us to a certain way of life, a life shaped by the life of Jesus. After all, it was Jesus who demonstrated humility—the Son of God dying on a cross for the sake of the world. It was Jesus who demonstrated gentleness—"Has

33. I speak here of the Church as the universal body of Christ while recognizing that the Church takes many local forms and has many sins and flaws alongside its glorious portrayal as the bride of Christ. We cannot allow the sins and flaws of the Church to keep us from acknowledging the great communal work God wants to do in forming a new people for God's self.

no one condemned you? . . . Neither do I condemn you” (John 8:10–11, NRSV). It was Jesus who demonstrated patience with disciples who didn’t quite understand the message of the kingdom. So when Paul calls Christians into a life worthy of their calling, he is calling them to a life shaped by Jesus’ example. And that example moves toward love. Repeatedly, Christians are told that love for God and for one another is the way that the world will know that they belong to Christ. The calling is for Christians to love the way Jesus loved (John 15:12). Among other things this means bearing one another’s burdens. Note, it does not say one individual should bear all the burdens of the community. No, the whole church helps to bear the burdens of the others out of love. This love shaped in the gentleness and patience of Jesus is a witness to the world of God’s calling into a new life.

Christians are also called to holiness. Often, Christians have associated “holiness” with a long list of things not to do, but the reality is that the call to holy living is a call to both relationship with and imitation of God. Peter says this clearly when we read, “as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15, NRSV). We are to look like the one who called us out of darkness and into light. But here’s the thing. Holiness doesn’t take place in a vacuum. First of all, the instruction to be a holy people takes place in the context of covenant. This instruction to be holy like God is holy originates in Leviticus—a book about how to live out the covenant relationship that God began at Sinai. First, God delivered Israel from slavery just as God through Jesus delivers

Christians from sin and death. Second, God invited into covenant relationship the people who were rescued. For Israel, this happened at Sinai. As Christians we remember the new covenant secured for us with the blood of Jesus when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It was only after the deliverance from Egypt, only after the deliverance from sin and death, that God instructed the people in holy living. This instruction included both community standards and protections like the Ten Commandments and a call to be holy like God is holy. Similarly, Christians are given a new way of living and called into imitation of the one who delivered them from death (see Matt. 5–7). God's people are invited to respond to this covenant initiative with faithful, loving, holy lives that reflect the one who called them and gave them new life. In other words, God calls us out of our old way of life and enables a new way of life through the power of Jesus' resurrection life in us.

God does give gifts to particular people. There are various lists of these gifts in the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:11 the gifts are listed as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. And the purpose of these gifts is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity" (Eph. 4:12–13, NRSV). In other words, these various leadership positions are gifts that God gives in order to enable the whole church to engage in ministry and to grow in their faith and witness. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lists another set of gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working miracles, prophecy,

discernment, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Once again, these are gifts given by the Spirit of God for the common good of the body (1 Cor. 12:7). They are distributed as the Spirit wills and to whom the Spirit wills. In the same chapter, Paul notes that God appoints apostles, prophets, teachers, those with deeds of power, healing, helping, leadership, and tongues (1 Cor. 12:28). Again, these are positions that are given for the mutual good of the church. Part of our work as Christians is to discern the gifts that have been given to the church by the Spirit and to use those gifts in loving service to God's people so that the whole church benefits from the gifts and grows in their relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

God calls. He calls the whole world to come into relationship with the Son, Jesus Christ. He calls Christians, those who have responded to the Good News about Jesus Christ, to live a life in the community of the church that is shaped by the love of Christ. In this way we demonstrate Christ's love for us and for the whole world and invite others to join in the new community of God's people that is shaped by the sacrificial love of Christ. God also calls the people of God to covenantal holiness. Such holiness is a faithful response to the God who lovingly delivered people who were enslaved to sin and death and brought them into God's kingdom. Within the call of God, everyone receives gifts. Some of those gifts may involve leadership among the people of God. All the gifts are for the purpose of building up the body of Christ so that it may grow

into maturity in its relationship with Christ. Discerning our gifting and using it for the common good of Christ's body is part of the Christian life. But the deepest calling of God on the life of every Christian is the call to loving, holy faithfulness to the God who calls.

GOING DEEPER

Whom does God call?

What type of life does Christ call us to? And what does it mean to live worthy of our calling?

Holiness has often been a long list of practices in which Christians are not to engage. How does God define holiness?

Voice: Rev. Dr. Carolyn Moore

Church Planter and Senior Pastor of Mosaic

United Methodist Church, Evans, GA

Master of Divinity, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1998

Doctor of Ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018

I grew up in a culturally Christian home. We were the kind who said a blessing at meals but never talked about God at home. My mother went to church most Sundays, and I usually went with her, but other than those hours in a church building, God had little power in my life.

At the age of twelve, I had a personal encounter and gave my life to Jesus. At thirteen, I heard his call into ministry, and knew it was a very specific call to preach. That was not a normal thing for a girl living in the South in 1975, so it took years for me to turn that call into reality.

It wasn't until I was thirty (a wife and mother) that I was willing to completely surrender my life and will to God. That's when God asked me to "wake the people sitting in the pews." I believe it was a call to awaken the body of Christ to the reality of the Father, to call to life those who are spiritually deadened by "church as usual." The heart of the Father is for his children to come into an intimate encounter with the Holy Spirit as they surrender to the work of Christ.

To live out that call, God has given me opportunities to form new expressions of “church.” I started and led a new worship service in downtown Athens, Georgia, where I learned (mostly through my own mistakes!) how to build a sustainable community of faith. It was there that I discovered my gift for speaking especially to those on the margins, who may have been raised in families much like mine, and who have never had the chance to become alive to Christ.

After five years of serving in Athens, I was appointed to Evans, Georgia, to begin a new congregation. Our vision at Mosaic is to make room for those in the margins as we serve together in mission. We have baptized nearly two hundred adults since the inception of our church and have seen hundreds come to faith in Christ. We have a strong commitment to healing and discipleship and are raising up new leaders for the body of Christ. Having experienced the challenges of entrepreneurial ministry, I learned early on that my calling and authority must be rooted in an ongoing, personal encounter with Christ. That pursuit of personal holiness is central to our life and ministry together. As we say often in our church, if Jesus isn’t in it, we’re not interested.

Now that I have had the remarkably rewarding experience of seeing a church grow from three souls (the sum of my immediate family members) to a place of health and vitality, I have a great desire to see other women enter the journey of church planting with better mentors, training, resources, and support. I want the voices they hear to be

voices of encouragement and confidence so the kingdom can come to earth as it is in heaven.

I sense the Lord calling me in this season to take authority as a true elder in the church, training up others who will take up the mantle to awaken the body of Christ. The joy continues; my prayer in this season is a passionate cry for the very thing that first drew me into this journey: “Lord, wake the people sitting in the pews!”

In addition to pastoring Mosaic Church, Rev. Dr. Carolyn Moore was recently elected as chairwoman of the Wesleyan Covenant Association’s Global Council.

CHAPTER 8

Listening in Liminality: Lessons Learned in the In-Between Spaces

Dr. A. Sue Russell

I had just returned from Southeast Asia where I worked with the leaders of the Galat community to complete the New Testament in their language.³⁴ For fifteen years I had watched God use the Galat men and women to bring revival to the Galat church and plant new churches in traditionally hostile areas. When the Old Testament was drafted, I sensed my time with the Galat was coming to an end. The project was complete, and for the first time in fifteen years I had no immediate plans for the future. But God did. During that year, God brought David back into my life—three years after we had said good-bye. And now, in three months we were going to be married.

As I sat in my office, I realized I hadn't read through the whole New Testament for a while and thought that

34. Galat is a pseudonym for the group name.

would be a nice way of enjoying time with the Lord. So I started in Matthew, and when I got to Matthew 28, I was ready to skip over it. The Great Commission no longer applied to me. I had done my “mission” thing. As I began to turn the page though, the Lord clearly spoke to me, “What has changed?” I stopped and realized I had gotten it all wrong. The Great Commission was not a call to full-time ministry but a call for every Christian to make disciples. Although my vocational calling was changing, my primary calling was the still same—making disciples. My vocational calling was how I would do this. No matter what vocation the Lord called me to in the future, I was called to make disciples wherever God sent me.

Perhaps you are like me and thought that only people going into full-time ministry receive a call. What I have discovered over the years is that God has called me into many different vocations and activities to make disciples. As I think back over those experiences, I realized how many times God placed me in a period of what anthropologists call “liminality” to learn lessons about discerning his call on my life. Liminality is the “between and betwixt” places in our lives. It is the period of transition when the old ends, but the new has not yet begun.

Throughout Scripture we see God using liminal periods to prepare people for his purposes. Moses led Israel out of their old status as slaves, and then they spent forty days in the wilderness where God prepared them to be his people in the world. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness after his baptism and before he began his public ministry. The apostles and believers spent days praying

in the upper room after the ascension but before Pentecost. Saul spent years in Tarsus after his acceptance by the church but before he was called to ministry to the Gentiles. Throughout Scripture, God used liminal periods to teach and prepare people for the next calling that he prepared for them. In my life, God has often used periods of liminality when I have finished one ministry but don't yet have direction for the next step to teach me lessons about calling and vocation. It is these lessons I've learned while listening in liminality that I share in this chapter.

PRAY SPECIFICALLY: THE ANSWER MAY BE UNEXPECTED!

“How did you get from forest management to Bible translation?” I don't know how many times I have been asked that question. The short answer is “God!” The longer answer is that God led me on a journey of discovery as he answered every criterion of a very specific prayer I had prayed. I expected God to answer my prayer, but how he answered it was totally unexpected.

During my first senior year (I had three of them as I spread four years of university into six), I became a follower of Jesus. I fell in love with Jesus and wanted others to know the Jesus whom I loved. I spent much of my free time participating with a campus ministry and soon became a leader. I was amazed at what God was doing on this campus, which was considered a “hard campus” by leaders in the organization. This experience made me reconsider my future career path in forest management. I sensed God leading me into full-time vocational ministry

with the campus group I had been actively involved in. I had every credential for becoming a member of their staff: I was a leader in our campus group, had been appointed the leader of summer ministries, and was highly recommended by our campus leaders. But to everyone's surprise, God closed that door in a very unexpected way. Thus, I found myself with no plans after graduation in six months. I had entered a period of liminality to discern God's will.

I was open to whatever God had for me in the future. I was sure that no matter what career I had, God wanted me to be involved in evangelism and discipleship. As I prayed, I began to develop three criteria for a future direction.

1. I wanted to be involved in evangelism and discipleship.
2. I believed that God wanted to use the gifts, talents, and training that he had given me.
3. If I were to go overseas, I wanted to go to China. (The third one was a stretch since I really wasn't interested in going to a different country. I had never even been overseas. The only times I had been out of the United States were on day trips to Mexico, but I felt like I had to give God the option.)

And so I began to explore possibilities. I went to different mission expos and gathered literature. I investigated different graduate degrees. I talked to my mentors and others who knew me at my church for ideas. I pursued several leads, but they didn't meet the specific criteria I had prayed about. Then one day, I came home and found a

news magazine from Wycliffe Bible Translators. The headline caught my eye. In bold letters it read “LOST.” Curious, I began to read the article. There were people who had gotten lost during their field training, and the leaders had organized a search to find them. I was trained in and taught mountain search and rescue, and it was obvious to me that they really didn’t know how to conduct a search. I thought perhaps they could use someone like me to train their missionaries. Although I knew I was not qualified to be a Bible translator since I struggled with learning languages, I sent away for more information about other things I could possibly do in their organization.

When the information arrived, I began to read about Bible translation. As I read about the process of translation, I thought, “What a great way to do evangelism by asking people to help with translation of Scripture. What a great way to do discipleship, to work with people verse by verse through the whole New Testament.” However, I knew that I wasn’t really the kind of person they were looking for because learning languages was very difficult for me. Language learning did not fit the criteria of using my gifts, talents, and training.

However, since God had not closed the door, I continued to pursue this direction. To find out more information about the organization, I asked a couple whose daughter was working for Wycliffe if I could have lunch with them. They agreed and about midway through our lunch, the father looked at me and asked out of the blue, “Are you good at math?” I was surprised at the question but answered, “Yes, math has always been my best subject.”

To my surprise he answered, “That’s really good because my daughter says that the linguistic analysis that they do for Bible translation is a lot like math, and if you are good at math, you will be good at Bible translation!” I had not expected that, and yet God had now answered two of my specific criteria. However, I knew that Wycliffe was not working in China. But never say never to God. When I went to Wycliffe headquarters during spring break, the chapel presentation was about Wycliffe’s future possibilities of working in China. God had met all three criteria, so I began my application to join Wycliffe Bible Translators.

I would never have considered being a Bible translator, but God knew the skills and abilities of the person whom the Galat needed to work with them. Many Galat churches had been established for forty years. The community had educated and trained pastors and elders who were able to translate the Scriptures. What they needed was someone who could help manage the project and coordinate the efforts of the sixty Galat churches to accomplish the leaders’ vision for Bible translation, literacy, music, development, discipleship and evangelism, and church planting into a long-term plan. It just happens that my forest management degree trained me to manage and create long-term plans that coordinated the efforts of various concerns for national forests, including wildlife, fisheries, forest production, recreation, water management, etc. God had given me the specific training that the Galat leaders needed for them to achieve their goals to serve the Galat churches.

Many times, we pray very vaguely about the future when asking God to lead us. However, if we pray vaguely,

how do we know when God has answered our prayer? The more general our prayer, the more general are the answers. Many people use SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) as a tool for management. I use this often for writing as well as training for an Ironman triathlon. I can say I want to finish a book or an Ironman, but without clear, specific, daily, measurable goals, I won't achieve my long-term goal. I discovered that when I prayed specifically, God answers these prayers very specifically. When discerning God's call, this provides very specific confirmation.

Another example of this was when my colleague and I were praying about our specific language assignment. My colleague and I both desired to be facilitators of a translation project and wanted to work with a church. At the time, this was not the normal model for Bible translation projects. Galat seemed to be a perfect fit for us, but there were three other teams who would choose before us, and the Galat community was the highest priority for a team. We left for our six months of national language school feeling called to the Galat but sure another team would be assigned to them. When we returned to begin working in a language community, we discovered that the other teams had chosen other communities for various reasons, and the Galat community still needed a team. We were both amazed at how God had worked.

These specific answers to prayer were also very important when times got difficult. There were many times during our language and culture learning that I was ready to give up. I felt like a failure because my progress in

language learning was so slow. But remembering the specific answer to my prayers and how God had led me to Bible translation helped me persevere through the rough times. When my colleague left the country to be married, I wasn't sure if the Lord wanted me to remain alone with the Galat community or go back the United States and take up another assignment. But then I recalled God's specific answer to our prayer for assignment to the Galat. I knew that God wanted me to remain and continue to work with the community. Looking back, God's answer to those specific prayers provided the confidence and strength to keep going through the ups and downs of the translation process. I also discovered that each time I needed help with a specific task that was beyond my abilities, God provided a person who had the specific talents and gifts to enable us to finish. God's call is often unexpected, surprising and, to be honest, sometimes mind-boggling. But he is faithful to help us to complete the ministry to which he calls us.

YOUR CALL IS WHERE GOD HAS YOU NOW (NO MATTER WHAT IT IS): BE FAITHFUL

I was grumbling to myself as I cleaned around the toilet of one of the rooms that was used as transitory housing for Bible translators returning to the field. The previous months had been filled with speaking engagements as the chairman of the Galat translation committee and I spoke at banquets and churches around Southern California. It was an amazing time of telling the story of how God had worked in the Galat community during the completion of

the New Testament. But now the banquets were over, the chairman had gone back to his country, and I was at headquarters for my furlough. As part of my housing arrangement, I agreed to be the weekend host for the transitory housing at headquarters. During the weekend I was available to hand out keys and to clean rooms if necessary. But this month the regular housekeeper had quit, and I found myself cleaning all the rooms for the week.

Finally, I had reached my limit and complained to the Lord, “Okay, Lord, how long am I going to have to be cleaning toilets? When do I get to do ministry again?” The answer was very clear, “If this is what I have called you to for the rest of your life, are you willing to do this?” I was taken aback because I hadn’t really thought of cleaning toilets as my vocational calling. It was just something I had to do for my housing. But I loved Jesus and if this was what he wanted me to do, if this was my next vocational calling, I was willing. With that decision, I embraced cleaning as my calling. I began to pray for the people who would be staying in the room. I knew after an eighteen-hour flight or several days of travel, people were exhausted. I prayed that they would find peace and rest in the rooms. I made an extra effort to make sure that they would have everything they needed. My cleaning became my ministry as I sought to find ways to help provide a smooth transition for families.

After this experience I began to look at other work differently as well. I began to ask, “How can I be mission-al where God has me now?” There are many times when we’re working to pay for rent or are in school perhaps

earning a degree and think that our ministry—our vocational calling—will come after we have completed our training, internship, degree, etc. I often hear students in seminary talking about how they can't wait until they finish school and get into ministry. They express frustration about the time school takes away from doing ministry, viewing ministry as something in the future. They look at their studies or the job they're working to support themselves as something to "get to" ministry. But what would happen if they saw these as the ministry to which God had called them now to make disciples. How would that change the way they perceived their co-workers, fellow students, and neighbors?

We tend to divide activities or occupations into secular and ministry. The secular activities are those we participate in as part of society; they're jobs we work to pay our rent and put food on the table, school or sports events for our children, jury duty in our community, recreational activities, or hobbies we participate in. Often, we define ministry as participating in church programs, activities, and events. The implicit and sometimes explicit implication is that our work, participation in secular organizations, and community activities are not really ministry. However, I believe that God calls us to unique vocations so we can make disciples of people who may never enter a church. We're to participate in activities that intentionally put us in contact with people who will be touched with God's love by our very presence and witness.

We need to envision our participation in these activities as part of our calling to make disciples. For instance,

I take part in triathlons. I train with a team, I belong to triathlon social media groups, and I participate in triathlons, even attempting to do an Ironman. In fact, although I have now participated in five Ironmans, for various reasons I have never finished one. Rather than hide my failure to finish, I decided to be authentic and express my disappointment but also the lessons learned. So often on social media, people only talk about their victories and successes, but I decided that I wanted to be real because I know others have experienced the same sense of disappointment. I hadn't realized the impact this had until the media arm of Ironman contacted me. They informed me that they had decided to make me one of their featured athletes at my next race. They chose me not because I was successful but because of my determination to continue trying.

We never know who is watching, but people are looking for a different way to live and sometimes God calls us to a new ministry in an unexpected way. I worked with the Galat people for fifteen years before returning to the States. I had met the man who would be my husband previously, but, at the time, we did not share the same calling and I had to return to finish my work with the Galat people. After I finished my translation work, he re-entered my life and we were married in 1998. Thirteen years ago, my husband had a full aorta dissection and had only a 3 percent chance to live. For twenty-eight days I lived in the critical care unit as my husband fought for his life. David did recover and became the hospital's miracle. When David came home, he felt compelled to write down his experiences in the hospital and asked me to do the same.

We decided as a thank you to the nurses, doctors, and hospital staff who were so instrumental in David's recovery to compile these vignettes into a small book and called it *Celebrate Life*. After we had handed them out to the nurses, we got a call from the hospital administrator who asked if we would be willing to give them two hundred copies so they could give them to all the staff at the hospital. Then friends began to ask us for copies for their friends who were going through similar circumstances. To date we have given out two thousand copies of this small book that tells our story about God's hand in David's healing.

This led to a new ministry for me as well. I had trained my dog to become a certified therapy dog, and it just so happened that this same hospital was starting to use therapy dogs in the care of patients. For the next five years, I was a volunteer at the hospital on the therapy dog team. Every week my dog and I visited patients and provided comfort and encouragement through pet therapy. Nurses who knew me would often direct me to other caregivers whose loved one was in critical condition. And every Christmas, I brought David with me to thank the nurses who kept him alive and brought him to wholeness. I never expected to have a hospital ministry, yet God used one of the worse moments of my life to lead me to a ministry I never would have considered.

Throughout our life, God calls us to participate in new ways to bring his love and presence to the world. We never know the ministry or people God will call us to. But whatever we are involved with, or whatever life brings us,

we have an opportunity to impact the people around us with God's love.

YOU ARE CALLED TO A PEOPLE: BE COMMITTED

When people meet me they often ask, "How did a third-generation Californian end up in Kentucky?" Another question I am often asked is, "Why did you do three doctorates?" The answer to both questions is "God." But both questions are important in the lessons that God taught me about his leading.

I had no intention of ever pursuing graduate studies. However, Wycliffe encouraged its members to pursue further studies to train people more effectively in linguistics and anthropology. While on furlough from 1992–1995 I completed an MA and DMiss at Biola University where I met my husband. After we were married, he encouraged me to complete my second doctorate in linguistic anthropology based on research I had done about language used in multilingual settings. In 2001 I was hired by Biola University to teach missions and anthropology. Since I had an interest in biblical studies, he encouraged me to take classes at Talbot School of Theology. During my ThM program, I was introduced to a methodology called social scientific criticism that uses anthropological models in biblical studies. As an anthropologist, I felt there were more nuanced ways that they could be applied. I wanted to enter these academic conversations but realized I needed the credentials of a doctorate in New Testament Studies to do so.

At the encouragement of my husband, I started my third doctorate program at UCLA in 2005.

I completed my third doctorate in 2013, the same year that my husband retired after working thirty-one years at Biola University. I had always assumed that I would spend the rest of my career teaching at Biola. I had tenure and thoroughly enjoyed teaching undergraduate students. But being deeply immersed in the research and writing for my dissertation ignited a passion and desire to do more research and writing. I began to have what I call a “holy restlessness.” It wasn’t that anything was wrong with my current job, but I felt like God was asking us to pause and listen to how he might be directing us for the future. And so, we waited, not sure where God was leading or if a change was coming but just being obedient as we entered a period of liminality, listening and waiting for God to speak to us.

During that year, there were six schools with open positions for a senior missiologist, including Asbury Theological Seminary. I sent my application packet in and after phone interviews I was invited to campus. As I began the on-campus interview process with the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission, I sensed a community and spirit that was appealing to me. I also read to my husband the faculty covenant in the faculty handbook. There was a commitment to community among the faculty that is not often found at other institutions, and it impressed me that they included my husband in this community. I also found a global community. One aspect of my “holy restlessness” was that due to my husband’s health I could no longer

travel. Yet God had put on my heart to provide opportunities for leaders like the men and women of the Galat translation committee to receive advanced degrees. And here at Asbury Seminary were global leaders, men and women, with whom I could participate in their training.

I was hooked. I loved what I found at Asbury Seminary, but I had one lingering question. As I sat with the dean and the chair of the faculty committee, I asked, “What classes will I teach?” Normally in the interview process with faculty, the search committee seeks to determine if a candidate’s credentials and teaching specialization aligns with the needs of the department or school. So far in the interview process we hadn’t discussed how my specializations would contribute to the program although several times I had asked, “But what will I teach?”

The question was never answered during the interview process, and I returned home wondering how I would fit and what I would contribute. When the Seminary called and invited me to join the faculty, I wasn’t sure if this was where God was calling me since I did not have a clear answer on the classes I would teach. I didn’t know if my gifts, talents, and training would be used effectively at Asbury Seminary. I needed a way to discern where God was leading, so I made two lists. The first list was what was attractive about going to the Seminary. The second list was what was attractive about staying at Biola. When I completed the lists, it was obvious that God was leading us to Asbury Seminary. I was a bit concerned how my husband would feel about moving to Kentucky though, since he had never lived outside of California. When I turned

to my husband to show him the lists, his only response was: “It’s about time you figured that out.” He had known all along.

What was not on the list for Asbury Seminary were the classes I would teach or, in other words, what my specific ministry would look like. In fact, that question was never really answered. What I discovered was that God had not called me to a job or to teach specific classes, but rather he had called me to a community. My calling was to a people and to use my gifts and talents to serve that community. What that looks like varies from year to year, but God has called me to serve a community in ways that meet its needs.

Many of us think we are called to a specific church or ministry. We think of it as a job description or having certain parameters. If we think of a church or ministry as part of our career, then starting certain ministries, sustaining growth, organizing new outreach programs, or in my case teaching certain classes places the focus of our calling on us and our success. However, God calls us to a people to serve a people. It may mean that the ministries we thought we would start may not be what people need.

I discovered when I worked with the Galat committee that I belonged to a community, and my gifts and talents were to serve the community. When I came back after earning my first doctorate, the committee discussed how they were going to use “OUR” doctorate. It also meant that as part of the community, I served the community. Although officially my job was a Bible translation consultant, I also helped the committee with their vision

for literacy, development projects, music, revival meetings, and church planting. My call was to their community, serving in any way I could with my gifts, talents, and training.

CONCLUSION

God works in different ways to help people discern their calling. Because of my personality, I tend to go full speed in the direction that God has shown me. When he wants me to listen and learn, I find that he speaks to me most clearly when I have completed a major project or ministry. It is at the end of one thing, before the next, in this liminal space that, for me at least, God speaks most clearly. As I look back over the places and people God has called me to, many of these lessons have applied, and it was often in a liminal space when they were learned. As a result, I have learned to be comfortable and expectant in the liminal spaces, the between and betwixt.

GOING DEEPER

Your call is where God has you right now. How is he calling you to be faithful?

How do you respond when you sense God is calling you to do something new?

How does God speak to you during times of transition?

Voice: Heidi Lyda

*Director of Love Your Neighbor (LYN)
House, Indianapolis, IN
MA in World Mission and Evangelism,
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After outbidding the Outlaw motorcycle gang for a building on the near-east side of Indianapolis, Indiana, in the early 1990s, the First Free Methodist Church began the slow and costly work of restoring the building with the dream of establishing a ministry for the neighborhood. What some planted, others watered, until finally in 2007, the Free Methodist Board of Directors received a \$7,000 donation from the Wabash Conference and established the Love Your Neighbor (LYN) House. With this donation, the board hired its first employee, Heidi Lyda, in 2009.

Heidi graduated from Asbury Seminary in 2008 with an MA in World Missions and Evangelism.

“When I graduated, I knew I had a heart for community, racial reconciliation, and people living in poverty,” Heidi said.

Though her degree was in world missions, she felt called to stay in the United States. After seeing a post on the Asbury Seminary website for a summer internship in inner-city Indianapolis, she felt that it would be the perfect fit. After arriving, she realized just how much of a

challenge she had taken upon herself. She lived upstairs in the house in a small apartment, so small that the kitchen was a refashioned tiny closet.

“When I started,” she explained, “the apartment was finished, we had carpet upstairs, no carpet downstairs, no operating ministries, \$7,000 a month budget, and no regular donors.”

Though the task was especially daunting, and, as Heidi maintains, she truly had no idea what she was doing, she quickly turned things around. She lived in the apartment in the house for three-and-a-half years, firmly establishing her role in the community, which was especially receptive to her. This was crucial because “being a member of that community is essential to what we do. Ninety percent of my job happens just because I live in the community.”

As a result, Heidi was able to put into action the mission of LYN House, which is “to demonstrate Christ’s love through compassion, hospitality, and transformational care.” The house is meant to serve as a safe haven for the residents of the community, helping them to meet their educational, physical, and spiritual needs. Heidi has poured the last twelve years of her life into this endeavor, making LYN House what it is today.

LYN House offers a variety of ministries to meet the needs of their neighbors. Among these is the one-on-one tutoring program for children in the neighborhood. This program prepares children for their educational futures and, if possible, encourages them to pay it forward by becoming tutors themselves. During the summer and

school breaks, LYN House offers what's called the "express yourself" camp, centered mostly around the arts. Because of COVID-19, they adapted their camps in 2020 and offered tutoring instead of art programming to their students. Most of their students received little-to-no instruction once shelter-in-place had happened and those working at LYN House wanted to help close the learning gap as much as possible.

Normally, they had a large pool of regular volunteers who were matched with the students 1:1, but to limit the number of people and contacts, Heidi and Education Coordinator Jessica tutored most of the students over the summer. The summer adaptations served them well into the fall once the students started back to school. In the past, the tutoring program was only two days a week, and each student was matched with a volunteer. Now, they rotate fourteen individual students throughout the entire week. Although this change was made due to COVID, it has allowed LYN House to establish a more rigorous tutoring program so students progress more quickly. As the school year progresses and COVID restrictions ease, they hope to train volunteers to use the materials and curriculum that they developed over the last several months into an after-school tutoring program in the neighborhood public schools.

"Over the years we have volunteered in the classrooms and offered an afterschool STEAM program," Heidi said. "Through volunteering we noticed that a large portion of their population was at least two grade levels behind academically. We felt that the best use of our time and

partnership with the school was to help them offer tutoring to their lowest performing kindergarteners during the school day.”

Although some programs, such as the basketball program for kids ages five to ten, were cancelled because of the pandemic and “express yourself camps” might take a different form in summer 2021, LYN House continues to offer the Summer Youth Employment program that began in 2019.

The Summer Youth Employment Program is in partnership with two area churches that trains kids ages fourteen to eighteen in job readiness and financial literacy. Then each student works at their respective site for the summer. One of the first youth was J.B., a junior at the time who had been with LYN House since his very first year. The Summer Youth Employment Program gave him the opportunity to work as a junior leader at the “express yourself” camp, offering him a paycheck and providing skills for the future. After that summer he continued to tutor at LYN House and volunteered as a tutor after his session. In summer 2020, he got a job at Dollar General.

“One of my proudest moments was going into his work and watching him ring up customers and helping a young woman in a wheelchair organize her purchases so she could get them home,” Heidi said. “His mom told me that he has had customers call his boss to compliment how great he is doing. It is exciting to see one of our students that we have known for more than ten years grow into a responsible, caring adult.”

Over the years LYN House has relied on volunteers to help with their various ministries.

“In a typical year we see over fifteen hundred hours of volunteer service,” she said. “This year we were able to make it work with less volunteers, and as restrictions lessen, we are back to increasing our volunteer base. Many of our volunteers have stayed with us for many years and as they move on to other things, we see them becoming donors.”

Much of LYN House’s budget comes from individual donors as well as the Free Methodist and other supporting churches.

“We operate on a shoestring budget and even through COVID have been able to make ends meet,” she said. “Every year we see God provide in surprising ways, and we are grateful for the volunteers and donors who make it possible for us to reach out and love our neighbor.”

Having lived in the neighborhood now for twelve years, Heidi cannot imagine being anywhere else. “Why would you not live on the near east side? It’s the coolest neighborhood in the city!”

Her faith has kept her strong through the hard times and given her immense joy in the good times. Through LYN House, she has truly embodied the radical hospitality and compassion of Christ, living alongside those she hopes to help and devoting her life to their physical and spiritual needs.

“I do this really out of my obedience to God and Christ,” she said. “I know that he has called me here to do this and to be here, and out of the love that I have felt from God and what he’s done for me, I feel like I have no choice but to do this.”

About the Authors

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Dr. Stephen Seamands has served as a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary since 1983. Dr. Seamands was the 2005–2006 recipient of the Excellence in Teaching and Learning Award at Asbury Seminary. His book, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (IVP, 2005), received the 2006 Christianity Today Award of Merit for books in church and pastoral leadership. In addition to teaching and working with seminary students, Dr. Seamands is actively engaged in leading seminars and retreats and conducting spiritual renewal events in local churches across the United States. He has a particular interest in theological and spiritual renewal within the United Methodist Church as well as the larger body of Christ. He also has a deep concern for the spiritual needs of pastors and Christian leaders.

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Rev. LaGrone is an acclaimed pastor, teacher, speaker, and writer whose engaging communication style endears her

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Jessica's books and studies include *Namesake: When God Rewrites Your Story*, *Under Wraps*, and *Broken and Blessed: How God Used One Imperfect Family to Change the World* and *Set Apart: Holy Habits of Prophets and Kings*, which have been used in personal and group studies around the world. She is a contributor to the Advent study *Under Wraps* and to the preaching guide *A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series*. Her study *The Rewritten Life* received Abingdon Press's James Moore Award for excellence in inspirational writing in 2017.

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DR. ELLEN L. MARMON

Professor of Christian Discipleship and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Asbury Seminary

Dr. Marmon served at Centenary United Methodist Church in Lexington, Kentucky, for sixteen years before joining the Asbury Seminary faculty full-time in 2005. She has also taught discipleship in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya. Dr. Marmon has also worked with local church leaders in Darwin, Australia; Papua, New Guinea; and Bihar, India. She has taken multiple mission teams to Mwimutoni, Kenya, which is outside Nairobi.

DR. W. JAY MOON

Professor of Church Planting and Evangelism, Asbury Seminary

Dr. Jay Moon served thirteen years as a missionary with SIM, largely in Ghana, West Africa, among the Builsa people, focusing on church planting and water development, along with his wife and four children. He is presently a Professor of Evangelism and Church Planting and Director of the Office of Faith, Work, and Economics at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has authored four books, including *Intercultural Discipleship: Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation* in the

Encountering Mission Series by Baker Academic. He has also edited four books, including *Entrepreneurial Church Planting: Innovative Approaches to Engage the Marketplace*. He is a frequent speaker on areas of church planting, evangelism, and marketplace mission. In addition to his role as a teaching pastor in a local church plant, Dr. Moon holds a professional engineer's license and his MBA focused on social entrepreneurship. His hobbies include treehouses, axe throwing, and small business incubation.

DR. JONATHAN A. POWERS

*Assistant Professor of Worship Studies,
Asbury Seminary*

Dr. Powers has a passion for the intersection of liturgy and spiritual formation in the life of the church. He has authored and co-authored several articles and books, including *Echo: A Catechism for Discipleship in the Ancient Christian Tradition*, *The 12 Days of Christmas Sermons*, and *Watchnight: John Wesley's Covenant Renewal Service*, all published by Seedbed.

In 2009, he was awarded the Hoyt Hickman Award by the Order of St. Luke at Asbury Seminary for excellence in liturgical scholarship and leading public worship. He also serves on the board of the Charles Wesley Society. In 2017, Dr. Powers was awarded the Vital Worship Grant by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship with a concentration on connecting the public worship of churches with worshipers' personal grief by studying historical and biblical liturgies of lament.

DR. RUTH ANNE REESE

Professor of New Testament, Asbury Seminary

Dr. Reese is also the Chair of the New Testament Department at Asbury Seminary and serves on the board of the Institute for Biblical Research. Since 2006, she has served as the Chair for the Formation and Student Committee, which oversees the faculty's role in the Christian formation of students at Asbury Seminary. Dr. Reese has written several books, including *2 Peter and Jude* (Two Horizons Commentary, Eerdmans, 2007). She is involved as a layperson at Apostle's Anglican Church in Lexington, Kentucky. She teaches, serves as Chalice Bearer, prayer team member, Lector, and coordinates the church's ongoing relationship with its diocese in Uganda.

DR. A. SUE RUSSELL

*Professor of Mission and Contextual Studies,
Asbury Seminary*

Before coming to Asbury Seminary, Dr. Russell was the Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Biola University. Prior to that, she spent seventeen years in cross-cultural ministry and field research with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Southeast Asia, where she worked with a committee of national pastors to complete the translation of the whole Bible into the Tagal language.

Her educational background provides the interdisciplinary foundations for bridging New Testament studies and missions. Her research, which focuses on the

integration of the social sciences and Biblical theology, has contributed new insights to New Testament studies, anthropology of Christianity, and contextual studies. Her research interests are Christian origins, social-scientific criticism, anthropology of Christianity, contextualization, language and identity, gender, and social justice. She is passionate about equipping people to live missionally in their global context.

HEIDI E. WILCOX

Voices Author and Host of Thrive with Asbury Seminary Podcast

Writer, podcaster, and social media manager, Heidi shares stories of truth, justice, healing, and hope. She highlights news, events, culturally relevant topics, and stories of the ways alumni, current students, and faculty are attempting something big for God. If you can't find her, she's probably cheering on her Kentucky Wildcats, enjoying a cup of coffee, reading, hiking, training her Border-Aussie, Barney, or spending time with her husband, Wes.