

**Study on Calling
Leaders Guide
By Vince Burens**

Introduction

Calling: Does it matter what I do or only that I do it Christianly?

"...to be honest, I am not sure what direction God is going to take me right now. I am not ready to jump into anything just yet without taking some time to really pray and meditate on the Word. I have a lot of stuff to sort through, but most importantly, I just need to focus on Christ and allow Him to shed light on my path."

This is part of an email message that was sent to the recruiting department a few weeks ago. It is not dissimilar from many emails that we receive each year from prospective staff who have decided that the CCO is not where God has "called" them to be at this time. I must admit, on the surface, this type of logic seems to be theologically sound and that of a mature Christian thinker whose desire is to be guided solely by God's Word and His Spirit.

However, when we dive into the Scriptures, are we told to hope and wait on God and then at some point, when we have gained His favor, He will choose to reveal Himself in a supernatural way? Is it then, and only then, that we should move to try to serve Him in some capacity? This topic of calling, brothers and sisters, is one of the least understood and most often discussed topics among young adults in our culture today.

To answer these questions and the many others that surround calling, we have put together a four-part Bible study series, loosely based on works by Os Guinness, Tim Keller, and others. My hope is not to minimize the importance of supernatural revelation in today's world, but to free us with the truth of Holy Scripture to do God's work faithfully as it refers to this topic. I would encourage all staff to go through these studies and to use them with your leadership students.

Why use them with students?

1) They are user-friendly and accompanied by a leader's guide for your convenience.

2) They answer foundational questions of the faith like:

- * Who is God?**
- * Who am I?**
- * Why was I created?**
- * Who was I created to be?**
- * Where can I serve to be faithful to the call?**
- * Does it matter what I do or only that I do it "Christianly"?**

3) They (students, that is) really have no clue what Scripture says about being called, but they use that word all the time.

I pray these Bible studies will be a tremendous blessing to the great work you have been called to do with college students!

—Vince Burens

Week 1

How would you define the nouns "call" or "calling"? Discuss the different meanings of "calling."

Verb, make a noise. Phone, address someone. Vocation, give a task, etc.

We speak here especially of "calling" as that work of God, whereby he communicates his will and purpose to a specific Christian believer. Why is "calling" an appropriate picture to use in this context?

We are addressed by God, he individualizes us, separates out for a specific task.

Calling as Godly Character—What we are to be.

Point out that there is a general calling which is applicable to each and every believer—to be holy and godly in character, conduct, and thought. This calling follows our calling to be a Christian in the first place. God's call on our lives to follow him is an identical calling every Christian shares.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Historically, to whom is Paul speaking here? Who is the modern equivalent?

Saints at Ephesus—ALL believers today

What "calling" is Paul speaking of here? How is this "calling" specific to believers?

Called to be a Christian—not all people, but those redeemed by God

What does it mean "to live a life worthy" of something? Can you give examples from your experience of living worthily?

Remember the closing scene from the movie, Private Ryan, when he asks if he has been worthy?

Note the order of things here: what comes first, the "calling" or the "worthy life"? Why are we to live a worthy life?

First calling. Worthy life BECAUSE of our calling to be Christians!

From verses 2-6, describe what "a life worthy of the your calling" looks like.

Read Hebrews 3:1

What do we learn about our calling here? What is the connection between "holiness," "brothers," "Jesus," "confession," and "fixing our thoughts"?

From these passages...

Who receives a calling? What is the essence of this calling? What character is being sought after here?

Calling as Godly Service—What we are to do.

When you think of "calling" as service or as vocation, what do you think about? Why?

Probably most equate it with Christian service because it is seen as "special"—not like "normal" work which needs no special calling.

Read Genesis 1:26

Here we read that God determined to make man and give him a charge or purpose. What do we learn of this purpose in this verse?

Rule for God over all

How does that relate to our calling to service in this world?

All is God's, hence, work in all areas of the world is part of our rule in his place.

Read Genesis 1:28

To whom does God give this series of commands?

Adam/Eve; them, both male and female; i.e., everyone.

Do you think these commands are restricted to a certain age? I.e., are they addressed only to the first man and woman?

Whose responsibility is it to fulfill these commands? Do you think that they have been satisfactorily fulfilled?

Adam and Eve? Everyone?

What are the specific commands God makes here? What is involved in making each happen?

Be fruitful

Increase in number

Fill earth

Subdue earth

Rule over all

Describe some acts that might be involved in "subduing the earth."

Eliminating evil; conquering wild; harnessing power; using/employing earth's resources

What parallels might be drawn between these acts and modern jobs? Or, to ask the question another way, how do modern vocations (medicine, engineering, business, politics, teaching, etc.) help further the task of "being fruitful, increasing in number, filling, subduing, and ruling over the earth"?

Was God's command to humankind to "work" a good thing or a bad thing? What does this say about the moral quality of work (i.e., is work good or bad)?
Good thing, hence, work is good thing.

How do these passages counter the notion that work is a curse or "a necessary evil"?
Part of God's good creation; not result of fall, but result of creation—especially creation in God's image.

Review

The Scripture refers to Christians by many titles. What lies behind the call for all Christians to be:

A servant?
Following the master

A slave?
No choice in obedience; faithful

A laborer?
Difficult work; committed

A minister?
Agent of care/compassion; active in completing task

Week 2

The One Who Calls

Leader's Guide

Make a list of reasons why people work. How important is each one in motivating you in your work?

Just to get the juices going...

Discuss the different ways in which the word "image" is used. Formulate a few definitions and then compare with a dictionary definition.

Image as mirror; image as "spitting image," i.e., copy; image as follower; image as non-existent apart from what it images.

Calling as Part of Being in God's Image

Read Genesis 1:26-28

What does it mean that humanity is made "in the image" of God? What do the different nuances of the word "image" imply about our creation and/or our purpose in creation?

Exist as reflection of God; to do what God has done; to stand "in place of God"

What does it mean for a person to be "in the spitting image" of their father/mother?

To act just like him/her; to do what they do

List some ways in which every person is intended to "image" God. In what ways are we NOT to "image" him?

To work like he did, to fashion, shape, mold, etc. To image in creativity, authority, extend dominion, relationships, etc.

NOT— to create out of nothing, to impose creational ordinances, assume absolute (rather than derived) authority/power

What is the connection between the first part of God's statement in verse 26, "let us make man in our image," and the next part, "let them rule...?"

Being in God's image implies a responsibility to "rule."

God does three things in verses 27-28: He creates, he blesses, and he commands.

**A. In what ways can we "image" God by "commanding" as he has done?
Teaching/disciplining others; proper exercise of authority;
follow/support creational norms**

**How does this passage clue us in that this is part of our imaging job?
Part of "ruling" is "commanding"**

**What might this "commanding" look like? What kind of work might be implied here? What does "commanding" NOT look like?
NOT—not authoritative/imposing own will, but exercising God's will with authority.**

**B. In what ways can we "image" God by "blessing" as he has done?
See above**

**What might this "blessing" look like? What kind of work might be implied here? What does "blessing" NOT look like?
See above**

**C. In what ways can we "image" God by "creating" as he has done?
See above**

**What might this "creating" look like? What kind of work might be implied here? What does "creating" NOT look like?
See above**

God's work of creating out of nothing (creation ex nihilo) is clearly limited to his divine power. However, there are other aspects of the creating process God employs in Genesis chapters 1 & 2 with which we can "image" him. Read or scan Genesis 1 & 2 for ways in which God brings about the universe. What does he do that we also are to do? A big list here, but note: naming things (God calls into existence with words); work/toil; care for creation; benefit from creation; suitable helper; interaction with God

How are these things connected to the modern concept of a job or vocation?

Speculate on the reasons why God might have given these commands to humankind.

The Purpose in Being an Image

Read Psalm 8

Spend some time analyzing the psalm. What are some different themes in this psalm? What primary message is the author trying to communicate?

Primary message = How majestic is your name in all the earth! Themes = humans' creation brings God glory; human next to God; we act in God's stead.

In this psalm, the author employs a literary technique called an inclusio, through which he intends to emphasize his point. In an inclusio, an author states his main idea both at the beginning and at the end of a passage, while using the middle section to support his message. What then is the main message of Psalm 8?

How majestic is your name in all the earth!

What role does humankind and the creation of humanity play in that main message?

Man acts in God's stead, ruling for him over his kingdom; God gets glory/majesty from man doing his job.

List the things that God does in this passage. What is so amazing about God?

Absolute sovereignty over everything! (including your work)

List those things that man is to do. How does the author view humanity?

An extension of God—his sovereignty, his rule, his role

What, then, is the ultimate purpose of having a job?

Mirror God; show his majesty; fulfill purpose of your creation

Making the Connection

What do these passages, and especially the emphasis on "imaging," tell us about the purpose of our creation?

Purpose = image God = to do what God does/act as representative of God

What do they tell us about what it means to be human? Can one be fully human without imaging God?

Cannot be human without imaging God, i.e., doing what he does, including work.

Given the connection between imaging and working, can a person truly image God without working?

How important is work to the nature and purpose of a human?

How is a vocation, your creation as a human being, and God all tied together?

Week 3

he One Called Leader's Guide

How does the concept of "gifting" relate to the way in which we image God (and go about the tasks of commanding, blessing, and creating)?

What does the term "gift" mean and how is this an appropriate term to describe the talents, abilities, and desires of an individual believer?

Calling as it relates to individual giftedness

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

What does Paul teach us here about different gifts, services, and working? Where do they all come from?

There are many different kinds of each of these. However, each and every one of these comes from the Lord.

What is the purpose of the Spirit's gifting of individuals?

They are all given for the common good, i.e. to use in order to serve the church and one another.

What are some of the ways in which the Spirit gifts?

He gives many gifts, including: wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues.

Who determines how the gifts are dispersed?

The very same Spirit, who gives to each one as He determines.

Are all individuals gifted equally or identically (see 1 Cor. 12:27-31)?

No. In fact, no two individuals are gifted identically. Some individuals are gifted with "greater" gifts and others with "lesser." Some are gifted with wisdom and others with faith. We should expect that every individual has different gifts and seek to determine gifts on an individual basis.

What is the relationship between "spiritual" gifts and "natural" gifts?

Who determines how "natural" gifts are dispersed, and are they dispersed equally?

This passage is specifically describing "spiritual" gifts. However, just as every individual is uniquely gifted by the Spirit with spiritual gifts, each individual has also been endowed by God with a unique set of "natural" gifts. The distinction between these two types of gifting is often difficult to make and should not be pressed. The point here is that God may have equipped you to run or sing or make widgets. (Whatever!) Whatever our gifts, they are to be used to serve our great God to his glory. We must not confine ourselves to a particular "gifts list" when considering how God has gifted us.

Read Romans 12:3-8

In light of our different gifting, how should each individual go about serving in the church?

Because we are differently gifted, we should set out to serve our brothers and sisters according to the grace given us. In other words, what God has given us the gifts to do, we are to do!

From these passages...

In light of our different gifting, how should each individual go about serving in the world through vocation?

The right vocation will differ from individual to individual, because each of us is differently gifted. Therefore, we must go about seeking to understand how God has uniquely gifted us in order to best serve Him in our world.

What are some of the ways we can determine what our gifts are?

Discovering our talents (What are you good at?)

Discovering our passions (What do you like to do?)

Trying new things (Many of us never discover or develop our gifting because we are too chicken to try!)

How can our fellow believers assist us in discovering our gifts?

More often than not, our brothers and sisters can be a great help in helping us to discover how we are gifted. Asking others what we are good at and not good at is a good place to start. We should also seek ways to serve our brethren—often this will reveal our gifts.

What are your gifts? List them and, if possible, ask others to list them for you.

Asking others to write down your gifts for you can serve as a very valuable tool for helping to know and understand yourself. Consider doing this with as many peers as you can—see what themes recur and whether there are any surprises.

For what services in the church do these gifts equip you? For what vocations do these gifts equip you?

Do the gifts listed allow you to serve your church through worship, hospitality, visitation, service, teaching, administration, etc.? What vocations would allow you to use these same gifts and abilities?

Vocational options—thinking broadly

In considering individual giftedness and vocational options...

Read Genesis 4:20-22

What vocations/activities are described in these verses?

Raising livestock, playing the harp and flute, forging all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.

Why take the time in the midst of a genealogical account to describe "raising livestock" and "forging tools"?

Apparently, the beginning of these human tasks was significant in God's view (otherwise, why inspire Moses to talk about them?).

How do these activities relate to the human task of "imaging" God?

These tasks show that human beings were making progress in their task of being God's image-bearers. Inasmuch as they were learning to create, control, and steward using God's Creation, they were fulfilling the task they had been given in Genesis 1. These seemingly insignificant tasks were therefore very significant.

If "raising livestock" is an activity worthy of Scriptural attention, what vocations are unimportant?

No vocation is unimportant or trivial—any task, however seemingly insignificant, can bring honor and glory to our God if it "images" him.

Making the Connection

What are the criteria for determining whether or not a given vocation is honoring to God?

Is this vocation consistent with God's call for me to "live a life worthy" and to image Him?

Do my vocational goals reflect good stewardship of the gifts which God has given me?

How can I best "image" God vocationally in light of my gifting?

Week 4

Called with a Purpose

Leader's Guide

In addition to "imaging" God, living a worthy life, and using our unique gifts, what other factors relate to our sense of vocational calling?

To what degree should the needs of the world around us impact vocational decision-making?

Called in order to...

Read Ephesians 2:10

How does Paul describe believers here? What is the purpose for which we are created?

We are God's workmanship—we have been created in order to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us.

If "good works" are integral to who we are to be as the people of God, how should this impact the options for Christian vocation?

We must ask whether the vocation we are considering is consistent with the purpose for which God has set us apart. Does this vocation allow me to do good works? How so or how not? Is this vocation in some way inconsistent with this divine purpose?

Read James 2:14-17 and I John 3:16-18

What is the relationship between faith and works (to use James' terms) or between action and truth (to use John's terms)?

Both James and John indicate that our Christian belief is absolutely bound to our Christian action. We must put our faith in practice. To not do so is to demonstrate that our faith is insincere.

What examples do each of these authors use to make their points?

Both describe those who are lacking in material necessities—food and clothing.

What actions are expected of the audience of these epistles?

It is expected that any Christian will put faith into action by caring for those who are in such great need. In fact, to not do so is tantamount to denying the Christian gospel.

Does the plight of our fellowman affect our call to a given vocation? To a given specialty? To a given location?

The needs of the world around us can, should, and must affect any decision-making concerning vocation. Not to consider these factors is to ignore one of our primary tasks as God's children and image-bearers. It is not difficult to see how this principle could be very relevant not only in choosing a vocation (such as doctor), but also in choosing a particular specialty and location. While it may be clear to you that God is calling you to be a doctor—is he calling you to do breast implants in New York City or to serve as a pediatrician on an Indian reservation?

How do we apply the union of faith and works in determining God's call on our lives to a given vocation?

Does this vocation allow me to put my faith into action to serve the needs of others or the world? To practically put my faith into practice in my vocation would look like...

Does this allow us to divorce our faith from vocational decision-making? Is it possible to be a Sunday-only Christian?

It is impossible for us to separate our work life from our faith life. Faith must be at all times and in all places put into action. This should be remembered as we seek our vocational calling.

What would it look like to put faith into action in my vocation?

I would do my job differently from non-Christians in these ways...

I would seek to serve the needs of others by...

A Case Study in Calling

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4; 2:1-5

What news does Nehemiah receive about his fellow Jews?

They are in great trouble and distress. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, its gates have been burned with fire. They are in bad shape!

How does this information affect Nehemiah? What does he do for the next several days?

Nehemiah is distraught—he sat down and wept. He mourned and fasted for days and then he prayed to the Lord (a prayer worth reading, in light of calling: 1:5-11). He plans to make a request of the king to return and help his people in their distress.

What is the ultimate result of Nehemiah's request?

The king allows Nehemiah to return. He uses his gifts and abilities as governor to secure Jerusalem and to deliver the people from their oppression. God uses him in his vocation to serve others.

What does Nehemiah's example teach us about the importance of external factors in helping to determine vocational calling?

Nehemiah had a pretty cushy and prestigious job as cupbearer to the king, but he was deeply troubled by the suffering of others and sought to use his gifts and abilities to help them. He models for us how we should also seek God for ways in which we can serve others through our vocation.

How does Nehemiah "image" God? Live a worthy life? Use his unique gifts and circumstances?

Nehemiah images God in many ways. He creates by bringing order out of the disordered state in which he found the Jews. He created a new governmental order and structure for the city of Jerusalem and for the Jews by becoming their governor. He was a great blessing to the Jews by providing for their spiritual guidance and training, etc.

Nehemiah models a worthy life in seeking the will of God through prayer, in seeking the spread of godliness through the proclamation of the word and in his godly concern for his brethren, etc.

Nehemiah used his unique position as cupbearer to Artaxerxes to gain a hearing and to obtain unique privileges for his people. He used his immense administrative and leadership gifts to help develop and guide his people in the midst of their turmoil, etc.

Making the Connection

What priority should looking at the needs around us have in relation to other factors when seeking to determine our vocational calling? Is it more important or less important than factors such as prestige, comfort, passion, money, gifting, purpose, commute time, family proximity, etc.?

This is one of the most important areas to consider when seeking God's will for our vocation. We have been blessed to be a blessing. Therefore, our task of being God's image-bearers, combined with our unique gifting and the need to serve others, should primarily guide us in this task. All other concerns are secondary and must not supercede these basic criteria.

Do my vocational goals take into account God's call on my life to do good and to help meet the needs of those around me?

Have I my vocational decisions been based in part on my gifting and the need to serve others? Have other selfish motives influenced these decisions?

Do my vocational goals allow me to honor God by imaging him? Are my goals set up in a way that my gifts and the needs of the world are prioritized?

If not, what vocation would best allow me to do this?