

WORK

Week 5: Calling and Work¹

FIRST STEPS TOWARD A CALLING

Where do we start? Here is a set of progressive question to begin:

- What do I want to do?
- What can I do well?
- Which people will I serve?
- Where will I serve?
- What burden am I willing to bear?

“In the beginning, it is natural to dream of glory, but most callings demand virtues” (99). It’s important to approach calling holistically, realizing that it is not just about developing a career, paying the bills, or staying busy, but about pursuing your God-given purpose in a God-given place among God-given people. **Suppose an individual is gifted musically. What callings might result depending on the different ways the above questions can be answered?**

Frederick Buechner says, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

We have to remember that personal calling is not just about paid work. It also must encompass our roles in discipleship, family, church, and the greater society. Ultimately, calling is about trusting God wherever we find ourselves: “Whether we move or not, whether we can reform our workplace or not, we should think, ‘This is my work, the place the Lord assigned’” (102).

“When in distress, we should not think first of a new job, city, marriage, or social circle. The great factors for happiness in any place are the Lord’s direction and our character” (102).

Food for Thought:

Do you believe that your current work/job is your *calling*? Why or why not?

What do people ask you to do? What do you love to do? Where do you bear the most fruit? Do people agree with your self-assessment?

While western workers may not speak of *calling* per se, they often do hope for self-actualization and achievement through their work.

Meanwhile, modern Christians often cling to a medieval hierarchy of *callings*—businessmen and laborers falling at the most secular tier, non-profit ministers and pastors above them, and pioneer missionaries in the highest tier of spiritual calling. **What similarities do you see between Christian and non-Christian views of calling—good or bad?**

From Daniel Doriani author of *Work*:

“First, no honest calling is morally superior to any other. Cashiers and corporate leaders, cabinetmakers and icemakers, all have a capacity to serve God and neighbor” (87).

What matters most is not our calling, but whether we have been faithful. On the Last Day, we will all answer the same questions:

- *Did you honor me by honing the skills I gave you?* (Mt. 25:14-30)
- *Did you honor the parents, mentors, and friends who invested in you?* (2 Tim. 1:5-6)
- *Did you use your abilities to provide for your family?* (1 Tim. 5:8)
- *Did you promote the good of your neighbors, mankind, and this world?* (Jer. 29:7)
- *Did my people get answers to their legitimate prayers through you?*

We all want to know the answer to the burning questions: **How do we find a job we love? Is there a job God designed us to do? And how do we keep our love for work from slipping away?**

CALLING: FAITH FIRST

When the Scriptures speak of calling, almost always it is referring to God’s call to faith (Romans 1:6-7; 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 1:9). At different times, the Scriptures speak of both a general and effectual calling:

¹ This study is a distillation of Daniel Doriani’s *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). It is meant to be taught in conjunction with the book, not as a replacement.

- **general calling:** the summons to all mankind to repent and believe the gospel (Acts 17:30; Mark 13:9-13)
- **effectual calling:** the work of the Spirit to draw the sons and daughters of God out of darkness and into the light of Christ's kingdom (1 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 9:15)

"STAY, UNLESS, BECAUSE..."

"The Scriptures teach us that God calls believers to places and roles" (90). But how do we know when it is time to leave a difficult job? What if a single woman longs for the new role of "wife"? Paul addresses the tension of God's calling in 1 Corinthians 7. **Have you ever waited for a sign from God about a job opportunity or a potential spouse?**

The Corinthians were pagans married to pagans before they became Christians. What were saved Corinthians to do about their unsaved spouses? Divorce? Stay married? Paul's argument can be summed up:

- **Stay** married whether your spouse is a Christian or not (1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 12, 13)
- **Unless** your unbelieving spouse leaves you (1 Cor. 7:15)
- **Because** you never know if your spouse might be saved through you (1 Cor. 7:16)

Paul used this same "stay, unless, because" principle when writing to singles in verses 8 and 9: "Stay single, *unless* your desires are unmanageable, *because* it is better to marry than to burn" (91).

Paul addresses ethnicity, then slavery, using the same logic:

- **Stay:** "Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it . . ."
- **Unless:** "(But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)"
- **Because:** ". . . For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ." (1 Cor. 7:21-22)

After each section, Paul re-iterates the calling to places and roles: Married or Single (1 Cor. 7:17), Jew or Greek (1 Cor. 7:20), Slave or Free: "So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Cor. 7:24).

Paul's point is not to endorse these circumstances. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he writes Christians should not willingly choose to be

unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). Similarly, regarding becoming enslaved Paul writes, "You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men" (1 Cor. 7:23). Rather, Paul's objective is to show how the call of Christ "reduces the power of our circumstances, so that we aren't constrained to change our location or position. We can stay where we were when Christ called us" (92).

"Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life." Is this an ideal Christians should strive for? Is it realistic? In a modern democracy, we can fall into thinking that spheres of work are "domains freely chosen." Paul shows us instead that "to find our vocation is not to choose the right spouse, work, friends, or residence; it is to see our web of relationships 'as divinely assigned places to serve God and neighbor'" (95).

We can generalize Paul's teachings on calling in this way:

- **Stay** wherever we work,
- **Unless** we can move to a better position in our social structure or improve the structure itself,
- **Because** God's people are responsible for themselves and for the wider world.

HOW DO I FIND MY CALLING?

A secular message goes something like, "Follow your passion! If that fails, pursue a job that uses your most strategic, well-paying skills." **What advice would you give to a young man or young woman trying to discover a calling?**

John Frame suggests that rather than beginning with a self-centered approach to calling, we pursue a God-centered approach:

- *God gives **gifts** to humanity and to his people*
- *The Spirit enables **discernment** through self-examination, mentors, friends, and co-laborers*
- *God provides **opportunities** to develop and exercise gifts*
- *God grants **wisdom** to use gifts to glorify Him and love our neighbor*

In the search for a calling, mentors are essential: "Mentors watch, appraise, give opportunities, and review the results" (97) **Where can mentors be found? What's the difference between an employer and a mentor?**