



MANNA
UNIVERSITY

WHAT IS MY CALLING?

THE "BE" & "DO" OF FOLLOWING CHRIST



A NOTE ABOUT THE JOURNEY

We are often led to believe that once a person is 'saved,' everything about their life changes. It is a powerful moment when we admit we are sinners and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. From that point forward we are encouraged to live out what we read in the Bible and share our faith with others. Through prayer and active involvement in a local church, we find our place and purpose in life. It's as simple as that, right?

Not exactly. Many Americans bring a 'self-help' mentality to their relationship with God. Words like destiny, purpose, and calling are usually (mis)understood to mean a ministry role at a local church or on the mission field. The process seems self-explanatory: envision where you should be; take action to get there. The problem with this thinking is that we did not save ourselves, and our efforts to better ourselves usually end in frustration.

Our starting point needs to be re-examined. Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commandment before the Great Commission. Said another way, there are things we are called to *be* and things we are called to *do*. Before we rush into the second category, let's take a look at the first.

"...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."
Mark 12:30 (ESV)

THE CALL TO BE

The late Eugene Peterson noted that “the Christian life is going to God.”¹ This is how it starts, and how it will end. We recognize our condition as sinners and receive Christ’s free gift of eternal life. Our relationship with the Father is restored. The Holy Spirit takes up residence within us and helps us become more like Jesus each day. It’s trendy to talk about selflessness, but our aim is Christlikeness.

“Spiritual formation in Christ is the process by which one moves and is moved from self-worship to Christ-centered self-denial as a general condition of life in God’s present and eternal kingdom.”

Dallas Willard

If our focus shifts to the Great Commission at the expense of the Great Commandment, we easily become task-oriented and miss the heart of our calling as children of God. Paul’s words strike to the core of this issue, “that I may know Him and the power of his resurrection, and share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death” (Phil. 3:10). We find our true selves as we pursue knowing Him.

Taking a page from the Reformation, let’s consider the doctrine of justification by faith. Romans 3:22 tells us that the righteousness of God was made manifest through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. The moment we are saved, we are seen as righteous in God’s eyes. Christ purchased our redemption from sin and gave us a right standing with the Father. We also see in Romans 8:15 that we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry “Abba! Father!” The central aspect of our

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2000), 45.

calling is to fully walk in this kind of relationship, with a constant prayer connection and heart-felt devotion to His word.

The unchangeable natural characteristics of who we are must also be accounted for. We did not choose our personality type, birth year, birth place, parents, siblings (or lack of them), hair color, height, or ethnicity. These factors indelibly play into who we are created to be (see Acts 17:26). How we think about ourselves is often shaped by the culture around us. If we harbor negative views of how He made us, we are in disagreement with our Creator. Psalm 139:13 states, "you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." Part of walking in our calling is to be at peace with God's plan in making us with these unique and unchangeable features.

Speaking of inward parts, a theme of the New Testament is Christlikeness. We commonly use the term 'character' to refer to the inward qualities that define how a person acts. Again, this is not a self-help program. The good news is that the Holy Spirit is here to form the character of Christ in us. The fruit of His work in our lives is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23).

"Value character over anointing and gifting. Anointing can come in a microwave, but character grows in a crock-pot."
Michael Fletcher

To recap, we are called to be conformed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29). This means fully living as sons and daughters of the Most High. The Holy Spirit is here to guide us into all truth (John 16:13) as we develop Christ-like character. Now to the question we've all been waiting for, what do we *do*?

THE CALL TO DO

You might expect this section to kick off with passion-filled statements about serving on foreign mission fields or preaching to large crowds who hang on your every word. Remember that character thing? Yes, that's our launching point.

The *be* and *do* of our calling are inseparable. Said another way, what we do flows out of who we are. Returning again to the Reformation, another point stressed in that movement was the priesthood of the believer. The church had grown to be clergy-centric in its practices (trained professionals do the ministry), so much so that it was scandalous to suggest that believers have a Bible of their own and in their own language. While we may think we've learned this lesson, it seems that we need to take a second look.

When we hear the words 'called to ministry' our minds often paint a picture of the person on the stage with the title. Certainly, God has appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11). The next verses tell us why. The function of these giftings is to equip the saints for ministry, to build up the body of Christ toward maturity. It's no wonder that many suggest we are in need of a second Reformation.

Some are called to serve in full-time vocational ministry to equip the saints. Most are not, but are called to minister in many other ways. Consider this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth

will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"²

When a person is gripped by the realization of who they *are* in Christ, whatever they *do* can be done "as for the Lord and not for men" (Col. 3:23). The priesthood of the believer tells us that a street sweeper's work is of value for the kingdom of God.

Back to that character thing. Our present vocations present many opportunities to form Christ-like character. If we have a job, we are called to render "service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man" (Eph. 6:7). If we have the worst boss ever or disagreeable co-workers, our diligence and good attitude will stand out. And, if we read the rest of that chapter, we'll find the call to pray (even for those disagreeable people).

"God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does."
Martin Luther

It turns out that the Bible has quite a few other *do* statements. Here are a few:

- we are called to be subject to earthly authorities and pray for them (Rom. 13:1, 1 Tim. 2:2)
- we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:39)
- husbands are called to love their wives like Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25)
- wives are called to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22)
- children are called to honor their father and mother (Ex. 20:12)

2. Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," speech given at New Covenant Baptist Church in Chicago, IL, on April 9, 1967, as quoted by Sharon Sequeira, The King Center, April 9, 2013, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/blog/mlk-quote-week-all-labor-uplifts-humanity-has-dignity-and-importance-and-should-be-undertaken>.

- the unmarried are called to please the Lord in body and spirit (1 Cor. 7:32-34)

Our calling is counter-cultural in many respects and requires the grace of God through the present work of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to His help with the roles we are called to, the Holy Spirit also gives us spiritual gifts (see Rom. 12 & 1 Cor. 12). Though it is life-giving to those who operate in them, these are for a purpose - the building up of the Christ's body. By using them wisely and with the right motives, we get to play a part in Jesus' plan to build His church.

A question still remains. Am I called to full-time vocational ministry? How can I know? We'll turn our attention to that topic in the next section.

LINKED TOGETHER FOR THE JOURNEY

There is a wise saying, “Don’t assign yourself a title. Let the body recognize a gift that’s in you.” For this to work, it is assumed that a person is actively serving in their local church. There are two aspects to consider: service and others. The formation of our calling, or discipleship, does not happen on our own; we need mentoring from those who are further down the road than we are. We also have a responsibility to engage in the process by finding ways to serve others. This presents opportunities for us to ‘try out’ our spiritual gifts and discover how our God-given qualities can be a benefit to those we encounter.

To take this a step further, here’s an insight Malcolm Gladwell shared: “The idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a critical minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise. In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours.”³ To test this, let’s consider Jesus’ method of training the twelve. Most scholars agree the Lord’s earthly ministry lasted 3 years. If the apostles spent 16 waking hours with Jesus for 2 years, that’s over 11,000 hours. As a bonus, He also took them through a 40-day Bible college of His own before ascending to the Father.

When a complaint arose about the distribution of food among the early church in Jerusalem, notice how the apostles responded. They summoned the disciples and asked them to pick out seven men of good repute (*another way to say character*), full of the Spirit and wisdom, to be appointed to the

3. Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), 39-40.

duty (see Acts 6). How did they know who to pick? It seems that a few stood out. Here's the point: engage in the process of *being* and *doing*, and others will recognize the growth.

Finally, don't forget the power of mentoring. That word carries many meanings, so let's define it in a biblical context - a mentor is someone who has godly wisdom from years of walking with Christ. A person you can be completely open with, who believes more for you than you do for yourself and loves you enough to tell you the truth. Mentoring like this works best when the person is further down the road of following Christ than you are presently. If your list of such people is short, make this a regular prayer request.

The words of the late Eugene Peterson elegantly capture this idea:

"When mountain climbers are in dangerous terrain, on the face of a cliff or the slopes of a glacier, they rope themselves together. Sometimes one of them slips and falls - backslides. But not everyone falls at once, and so those who are still on their feet are able to keep the backslider from falling away completely. And of course, in any group of climbers there is a veteran climber in the lead, identified for us in the letter to the Hebrews as 'Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in' (Heb. 12:2)."⁴

We are not alone in this journey of following Christ. God has given us faithful fellow travelers to help us along the way. As we

4. Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2000), 91.

link in to one another for healthy connections, we experience Jesus' wisdom and care for us along the path.

For those who sense a call to full-time vocational ministry, formal academic training is a great idea. Every believer has a calling to lead in their present contexts - to minister to those in their spheres of influence. The *be* helps us *do*. May the Lord's grace be powerfully with us as we pursue our callings and help others in their journey toward Christlikeness.

ABOUT US



MANNA UNIVERSITY

Manna University is a biblical higher education institution dedicated to Preparing Emerging Leaders to Change the World by advancing the Kingdom of God through sound biblical training, practical ministry and personal development.

This resource is an offering to the body of Christ with the hope that it brings blessing to the lives of many. Please drop us a note to share your questions or comments about this eBook.

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**EVERY BELIEVER HAS A CALLING.
IT'S TIME TO GET READY.**

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