

# HINNEH

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*an event on*

*a blog series on*

*an ebook on*

**VOCATION &  
CALLING**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION **The Two Pitfalls of a Calling From God** *Tyler Braun*

ONE **Form and Function** *Hannah Anderson*

TWO **The Playground Parable** *Natasha Metzler*

THREE **Confronting the Chaos** *Brett McCracken*

FOUR **By Design** *Lore Ferguson*

FIVE **An Incarnational Call** *Ryan J. Pemberton*

SIX **Vocation in Stages** *Kyle Reed*

SEVEN **Your Will Be Done** *Arleen Spenceley*

EIGHT **Calling is a Verb** *Cara Strickland*

NINE **When You Aren't Gifted, God Equips the Called** *Jonathan Pearson*

TEN **On (A)vocation** *Jenelle D'Alessandro*

ELEVEN **A Prayer for the Work of God and Humanity** *Paul J. Pastor*

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# The Two Pitfalls of a Calling From God

By Tyler Braun

Sometime in high school how I thought about life changed in a dramatic way. All throughout childhood and even my early teen years, my thoughts toward life were completely focused on what was happening in the moment. Questions such as, "did that girl notice me?" or "how many hours of video games do I want to play today?" were at the forefront.

But as I moved closer to graduation the questions moved toward "what do I want to do after high school?" and "who is God calling me to be?". Often these were the questions posed by others to me, but soon enough they echoed deep within me as my own questions.

Now over a decade later, and despite a Bachelor's and Master's degree to my name, and despite finding a career to pursue, and despite children who call me daddy, I'm still asking those exact same questions.

"God, what is it you want me to do with my life? God, who is it you're calling me to be?"

In trying to provide answers to these questions I see Christians pursuing God's calling in two separate and equally poor ways.

## 1) Calling as Knowing Your Gifts

Calling is often reduced down to the simplicity of taking a gifts inventory by using Myers-Briggs and Strength Finders 2.0. Know your personality and understand how you're wired and then find the mix of possible occupations. It's a simple equation, and it's simplicity will leave you wanting, or worse, wandering.

This gifts-based understanding of calling involves absolutely no faith. You can google search "how to find your calling" and any number of life coaches have short tests you can take to help illuminate occupations that will fit your personality and gifting. If calling is primarily about personal gifting then why does Paul boast in his weakness over and over (1 Cor. 10)? As your life likely attests to, calling goes far beyond the most rational decision.

When God called Abram to leave his family, his hometown, and his country of origin, God did not make sure Abram had the gift of adventure and spontaneity. No, Hebrews said God knew Abram to be a man of faith and it was his faith that led him to follow God's calling.

## 2) Calling as a Lightning Bolt from Heaven

As a pastor, some of the most frustrating conversations I have are when people emphatically proclaim to me, "God told me that I'm supposed to \_\_\_\_\_," you can fill in that blank in any number of ways. My usual response is to ask when they heard this from God, and if these words from God had been affirmed by other people or circumstances.

The answer to the question of what you're supposed to do with your life is too easily given as the cliché "you just need to hear from God." This then is used as a "choose your own

adventure,” “do what you want to,” sort of thing. It has more to do with self-centered blinders than it does to do with faith.

I say this because faithful leaps are affirmed. They are affirmed within your soul by the God who calls, and they are affirmed by the saints who have walked and will walk step by step with you.

How do we fulfill God's calling on our lives while avoiding the pitfalls of calling exclusively being about gifts or about divine intervention?

That question, along with many others related to it, is what we hope this book addresses and helps provide fertile soil where answers begin to sprout up. In all honesty, I hope you finish reading this and have more questions than answers, but that you know what to do with your questions. It's asking these questions in the proper context that allows the Holy Spirit to guide you to answers.

May you be like Isaiah, who responded to God's calling with “Hinneh!” — “here I am, send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

*You can find Tyler Braun at [manofdepravity.com](http://manofdepravity.com). He is the author of *Why Holiness Matters*.*

# Form and Function

By Hannah Anderson

If you wandered through the Laurel Highlands in southwestern Pennsylvania, you might stumble upon one of the United States' greatest cultural treasures. Today there is a visitors' center, a parking lot, and a gift shop, but if it were seventy years ago, you might not even notice the structure until you were directly in front of it. Once you do, you'll see that this multi-level building uses clean lines and natural building material to blend into the wooded hillsides that surround it. Wander a little closer and you'll see that the house is actually—and ingeniously—built over a stream of water that cascades into a pool just beneath it and gives its name: Fallingwater.

In 1935, Frank Lloyd Wright designed Fallingwater as a vacation home for Edgar Kauffman, Sr. The house was meant to be an escape from the modern world and the dense coal smoke that hovered over the Kauffman's home in the industrial city of Pittsburgh. Because Wright subscribed to the theory of organic design, he believed form and function—how a thing is used and how it is shaped—must be integrated; or as Wright put it, “Form and function are one.” So when Wright designed Fallingwater, he attempted to make it an outgrowth of its natural environment. The result was a building that not only served its purpose as a vacation home, but today stands as a work of art, drawing more than 150,000 visitors a year.

What Wright understood is that the use of something is intrinsically connected to the way it is made. The purpose of something shapes it. But the reverse is true as well. The shape of something reveals its purpose. We see this in nature in everything from the hummingbird's long beak to the duck's webbed feet. We even understand it in objects.

*But what about in ourselves? What about our own sense of calling and purpose?*

When we think about how God made human beings—even to the details of our physical bodies—we can see instantly that God Himself subscribes to the theory of organic design. And yet, how often when we talk about calling or vocation, do we talk about it as if it were something apart from us? We talk about “calling” as if it were something that we must pursue in order to fulfill our identities, rather than it being something that flows naturally from them.

The truth is that your purpose reveals itself through the shape of your life; your calling reveals itself through the details of your identity. At the most basic level, you are made in God's image, and you are called to reflect and represent Him. Because you are an image bearer, you are called to be like Him by doing what He does—to be loving and gracious and life-giving because He is loving and gracious and life-giving.

But beyond this, when we think about our individual callings, we cannot divorce our sense of purpose from our individual identities. To do so is to deny God's providence and sovereign design. When God made you in your mother's womb, when He placed you in the membership of His body, He did so with intention and purpose. So whether you work as a baker or mother or mathematician, you cannot escape the fact that this calling comes directly from the details of your life. This calling comes directly from your Creator.

So the next time you worry about finding your purpose, look at how you are made. Look at what your heart loves to do. Look at what is in front of you and what surrounds you. And when

you do, you'll most likely discover that your calling fits as naturally with these things as Fallingwater does with the hills of southwestern Pennsylvania.

*Hannah Anderson is the author of Made For More and you can find her at [sometimesalight.com](http://sometimesalight.com).*

# The Playground Parable

**By Natasha Metzler**

There once was a father who had two daughters. He loved them both equally and wanted the very best for each of them. They lived beside a vast park and every day they would walk over to the playground. The father would kneel between them, an arm around each, and tell them the rules.

“You must stay in plain sight,” he explained. “Do not go in the woods surrounding the playground. Do not even go near them. Instead, play where you can clearly hear my voice. There are dangerous things beyond this place, but if you stay close, you will be perfectly safe.”

The younger daughter felt nervous. How could she know if she was close enough to hear her father’s voice? She spent the afternoon looking fearfully over her shoulder, wondering if she was okay. “Is this where you want me?” she would ask him every time she started toward a new place. The only problem was that she never quite made it where she was going. Her heart was too fearful and her steps too timid.

The older daughter chose to race from the swings to the slide to the monkey bars. She laughed and played. Every little while she would glance over at her father and wave. At one point she wandered too close to the woods but spun around when she heard his voice. “Back this way, child.” He said. She apologized and hurried off toward the swings again.

The father loved both of his daughters the same. He delighted in them. Yet, one could not help but notice the way he watched his younger daughter with a bit of sorrow tinging his expression. It was important that she obey the rules and stay in the circle of safety—but he sorrowed at her fear. He longed for her to simply trust his voice, and to learn to trust her ability to hear him. “I’ll tell you if you start to wander too far,” he explained to her. “Trust me.”

In Christian circles there is much talk about finding “God’s calling” for our lives, and most of it is good! He does have a will for us. We have been created for a specific purpose. But too many times I think we take that truth and create chains of fear. Like the younger daughter in the story, we never quite make it to where we’re going...because we’re too afraid to take the next step.

There needs to be a level of trust. God is not some secret-keeper in the sky, hiding your purpose from you. He is a loving Father who delights in you. Yes, you need to listen to Him! Absolutely.

Using the playground analogy, if He says, “Child, I want you to stay on the swings right now.” Then listen! If He says, “Go to the monkey bars today.” Do it! But if He says nothing, don’t stand there in fear. Trust that if He needs you a certain place, He’ll tell you.

Go swing—and point your friends on the swings toward your loving Father.  
Go slide—and point your friends on the slide toward your loving Father.

And while you’re going here and there, enjoying the things you’re doing today, just remember there are some pretty basic boundaries. God may give you the freedom to choose who to marry, but I guarantee that dabbling in sexual immorality will take you right off the playground and into the woods. He may not say, “Go to North Africa as a missionary,” but He does say that you are to be light and salt to a dark and lost world.

Follow the basic guidelines and trust Him to speak if you need to do something different.

He will. I promise.

Keep looking to His face, keep your ear tuned to His voice—and walk in confidence.

*Natasha Metzler is a blogger and farmer, and the author of [Pain Redeemed](#). You can find her online at [natashametzler.com](http://natashametzler.com).*



# Confronting the Chaos

By Brett McCracken

I work in the marketing department of a Christian university, producing brochures, websites, billboards and commercials where language of “world impact” is as prevalent as our latest *U.S. News and World Report* ranking. But what does “world impact” mean? It’s inspiring to sell prospective students and parents on an education that will lead to something world changing. And it works. But the truth is not many graduates of our university—or any university—go on to have any sort of “global” impact.

Though the calamities and injustices across the world inspire in them ambitious activism, most will find end up in jobs doing something far more domestic. Though the world beckons them to celebrity, most will never have more than a couple hundred social media followers. And that’s OK. Most of them will still be used profoundly by God, if they’re willing to embrace the radical nature of “ordinary” work.

When I teach First Year Seminar to freshman students at my university, I lead a few class sessions on calling. We read *The Call* by Os Guinness and discuss the differences between “primary” and “secondary” calling. Our primary calling as Christians, says Guinness, is by, to, and for Christ. Before we are called to a specific job or location, we are called to a person: Jesus Christ. All Christians share the same primary calling, but each of us has a different “secondary calling,” the specific task God has prepared for us to do. Most of us naturally spend most of our time stressing about our secondary calling—the specific whats and wheres and hows of life. But we will only flourish when we recognize these as secondary to our primary call to obediently pursue Christ. Secondary calling matters, says Guinness, “but only because the primary calling matters most.”

When we get the order right, when we stake our identity not on what we do but in Who we pursue, it becomes easier to see all sorts of seemingly mundane jobs as sacred callings. We begin to see that we don’t have to be pastors or missionaries or bestselling Christian authors in order to glorify God. We can be bakers and welders and soccer coaches. In his book, *Every Good Endeavor*, Tim Keller talks about how a Christian approach to work doesn't need to mean “looking at” Christian things, as if being a Christian doctor meant only treating Christian patients or being a Christian architect meant only designing churches. Rather, Keller says, it's about “looking through” a Christian lens: seeing every vocation through the perspective of following Jesus and being the people of God.

But how do we look at something like welding through a Christian lens? Isn’t that just a “secular” job? Yes, we know Jesus himself was a tradesman, but how does something like carpentry contribute to the expansion of the kingdom of God?

Something that has helped me think Christianly about vocation is to look back at the first few chapters of Genesis and examine the creative activity of the original “worker” in whose image we follow.

In the beginning, God *worked*. He brought form to formlessness and light to a dark void. He created an orderly world out of disorderly chaos. The first scene of the Bible is work, and it’s a beautiful thing. “Let there be light...”

But a few scenes later, God does something crazy: He creates humans in his image and gives them the ability to create, to cultivate, to work; to join Him in bringing order out of the chaos (Gen. 1:28, 2:15). Why? Because the story God is telling from the beginning until the end is an epic of good overcoming evil; illuminating light overcoming formless darkness; the “order” of Eden expanding outward into the chaos, gradually making the world a more orderly and “good” place, even as Satan does everything he can to breed chaos and disorder.

God enlists humans to help counter the chaos-breeding “work” of destruction and evil with the order-instituting “work” of creation and goodness. Work is not a humdrum necessary evil. Far from it. Work is our way of laboring alongside God to create order and bring light to an aggressively disordered and dark world.

Bringing order out of chaos. This is a key Christian lens through which we should see every vocation.

Work is a sacred calling. And not just work that is mission or ministry oriented. If we understand the God-ordained mandate of work to be essentially the idea of making the chaotic world a bit more *ordered*, think of all that that entails.

- Doctors and nurses bring order to the chaos of broken bodies and the disorder of disease.
- Architects and engineers bring order to the chaos of the forces of physics and raw building materials.
- Therapists and counselors bring order out of the chaos of personal demons and interpersonal conflict.
- Secretaries bring order to the chaos of appointments, schedules and e-mail backlogs.
- Painters bring order to the chaos of blank canvases, colors and textures.
- Accountants bring order to the chaos of balance sheets and taxes.
- Teachers bring order to the chaos of a class full of learners and the material they need to learn
- Electricians bring order out of the chaos of currents, voltage and power grids.
- Programmers bring order to the chaos of code and web communications.
- Chefs bring order to the chaos of infinitely combinable ingredients and flavors.
- Referees bring order to the chaos of a sports match that could get unruly.
- Writers bring order to chaos of words, sentences and ideas that need communicating.

And on and on...I challenge you to look at your vocation, whatever it might be, through this lens. In your community, in your family, in the lives of the people you encounter, what are you bringing order to? In what way, however small it may seem, are you making this chaotic world a bit more orderly?

*Brett McCracken is the author of [Gray Matters](#) and [Hipster Christianity](#). He blogs regularly and can be found on Twitter [@brettmccracken](#).*

# By Design

**By Lore Ferguson**

My great-grandfather was an artist and so was my grandfather, and my father, when he took a pencil to napkins in restaurants or bic pens to paper in our kitchen, he was an artist too. He, like all parents of burgeoning children, thought me an artist too, but I felt that every sparse compliment was his way of taking ownership over me: this is mine, I created her and now she creates too. And so I stopped drawing.

I still inked in margins and doodled on homework, but the real work of artistry happened in my head where it would be safe from the gift of DNA and genetics. I am stubborn like this.

I was in middle school when my father left his position of 25 years to work as an entrepreneur, a graphic artist. I couldn't understand work being a calling or working at your gift because work, to me, was laborious and had little reward. My parents were always into hard work and never into allowances, both models which I am grateful for now, but despised then.

"You could do this too, you know," he would tell me and I would shrug my shoulders.

He had boxes of paper samples and a fanned book of colors with codes I didn't understand, but I was secretly fascinated by it all. Sketches of designs and type and programs he left open on his computer—all of it some secret world into digital design. This was 1992 or 1993 and he was just starting out, so his tools were crude, but his creations were not.

I remember the first design of his that I saw in the real world, a car-dealership logo on a highway in Upper Bucks County. I knew all the headache and pain and frustration and fears that had gone into that logo and I knew that though the rights no longer belonged to him, the artistry did.

In college I was the senior editor of our literary magazine, a 100 page annual of the finest our English and Arts departments could offer up on the altar of narcissism. I was the editor because I was a hard worker and a good writer and our faculty liked that about me, but I knew next to nothing about layout or design. It was the first time I touched the digital tools that had come so far in only a decade, since my father was towing the line of graphic art.

I spent hours on those programs, aligning margins, editing content, placing objects and that semester I also took a class in digital illustration. I found the classes easy and intuitive, a creative outlet from the technical writing and literary analysis I was spending the bulk of my time doing. The design lab was a secret and dark room, special permission only and I was let in—they *let* me in.

The following semester I took a class in painting and somehow became friends with the professor, a young, brooding artist who pushed my skills from flat, boring still-lives to my real love, mixed media with a message. I illustrated my favorite Flannery O'Connor story and gave the finished product to my mother for Christmas. I rarely go to Florida, where she lives, so I haven't seen it since.

I finished college, picking up enough art classes for a minor, though graduated with plans to only write for the rest of my life. But DNA is a hard beast to beat and now it is my desk that

holds paper samples and a fan-book of Pantone color codes, my pens and pencils inking sketches on notebook papers.

The truth is that I design, though I am only marginally good at it, because to do what I really want to do is too fearful a step to take. Sometimes I think about my dad, who quit after 25 years to pursue a dream and a gift and I wonder if I will ever be as brave as him to stop doing what I accidentally discovered I *could* do, and to start doing what I know I was *born to do*.

*Lore Ferguson writes regularly at [sayable.net](http://sayable.net), and you can follow her on Twitter [@loreferguson](https://twitter.com/loreferguson).*

# An Incarnational Call:

## Timeless Vs. Time-Full Understandings of Calling

By Ryan J. Pemberton

“I don’t think this is where you’ll always be,” my wife said to me in a moment of honesty, “but maybe this is the right job for *right now*.”

We had been reflecting on an unsolicited job offer that had come my way, which had surprised me as much by the lack of effort on my part as by its responsibilities. It wasn’t what I was expecting, and I wondered how it fit with what I believed God was calling me to.

A few years earlier, I had given up a perfectly good job at a marketing and public relations firm to return to school to study theology. At the time, I had felt that God’s call on my life would involve using my communications background paired with a theological education to write and speak in a way that helps others see Christ more clearly.

The job in question was a marketing job back in our old hometown. After traveling around the world, and with two theology degrees now under my belt, I wondered what that meant.

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If you’re anything like me, you probably think about calling as something static or timeless. “*Writing* is my calling,” you might say. Or opening up a bakery. Or playing the cello, perhaps. And I’m beginning to think maybe that’s not quite right. Or helpful.

And yet we find this static, timeless approach to calling offered in the books we read as much as the way we talk about it in conversation.

Many books on calling, for example, tend to offer a system or plan, focusing on an assessment of your skills, ambitions, and just maybe even the needs around you, to help find “*your* calling.” And I think there’s something immediately disturbing about this approach to the subject, especially for Christians.

If calling is found by way of a Venn diagram, three-step plan, or another system, then what happens is that God—the *living* God—becomes arbitrary quite quickly. If all I need is the right plan to find “*my*” calling, then once I have identified “my calling,” these sorts of approaches lead me to think I can go ahead and follow *that*, without regard for God’s daily will for my life.

But if the word “calling” assumes a caller, and if, for the Christian at least, the One who calls is the living God, then this sort of “lifeplan” understanding of calling simply makes no sense for Christians. Calling ought to begin and end with the One who calls.

Another thing to consider in terms of how calling tends to be talked about is that if I think of calling in terms of something I possess or control—as “*my* calling”—then I’m going to find myself frustrated when things don’t work out as I had envisioned (which, by the way, they rarely do). If, instead, calling is understood as a dynamic gift given to us by God, as something we live into day by day, rather than something we possess, control, or must force, then we are invited to live with considerably less anxiety. Calling is no longer about me “figuring it out” so

much as me living into that which God is already preparing me for, already leading me to, already inviting me to live into, right here, right now.

It's more than just semantics when I encourage Christians to talk less of "my calling" and more of God's call on our life.

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"Never, however, can yesterday decisively influence my moral actions today," the German pastor, theologian, and Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer once told a Berlin congregation. "I must rather always establish anew my immediate relationship with God's will. I will do something again today not because it seemed the right thing to do yesterday, but because today, too, God's will has pointed me in that direction."

If the word "calling" assumes a caller, and if, for Christians, that Caller is the living God, then it doesn't make sense to consider calling in a timeless sense, as a one-off directive placed on our life that forever guides our decisions, like some rigid principle. Instead of thinking of calling in a timeless sense, we ought to think about calling in a *time-full* sense. As something we must always return to God to receive anew, for the moment-by-moment needs of *this* day.

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"Follow *me*," Jesus says to His first disciples. So, too, for any who He calls His own today. Which means that as soon as we write off a particular job, direction, or choice outright, on principle, we are no longer following the living Lord, but a way of our own making. The idea of a timeless call will steer us away from our *time-full* responsibilities, given to us by the One who calls out still, "Follow me."

If I think of calling as a particular line of work—writing, for example—then I'm going to likely spend a lot of time waiting and wondering when my life is going to begin. I will spend a lot of time feeling as though if I'm not writing—or opening up my own bakery or being invited to play my cello or doing whatever I may think of as "my calling"—then I'm not doing what God wants me to be doing. And that's enough to drive anyone mad.

But if calling is less a particular job, school, or even place, but more an active posture of surrender and receptivity to the living Lord's leading in the moment, then I can use my particular giftings in a way that honors Him, wherever I might be at the moment.

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"Maybe this is the right job for *right now*," my wife said, referring to this job that I would not have otherwise imagined fitting in with "my calling," yet which may be just what God is calling me to in this moment.

Calling can never be considered in the abstract, but must always be prayerfully considered in the concrete needs of the moment. Calling must always be *time-full*, never timeless. Like the One who calls, our understanding of calling must become incarnational.

*Ryan J. Pemberton is a Pacific Northwest writer and the author of [Called: My Journey to C.S. Lewis's House and Back Again](#). You can find him online at [@ryanjpemberton](#) and at [RyanPemberton.com](#).*

# Vocation in Stages

By Kyle Reed

Do you remember those times as a kid when someone asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up? I sure do. It was a magical question that was filled with hope, opportunity, and excitement. There was no hint of fear, doubt, or worry. This was the time to dream and say whatever your heart desired. I don't know about you, but I think it was right around the age of 12 I lost that excitement and the reality that "my dreams" might not come true.

"Honestly Kyle, I don't think you have worked hard enough to become a professional." Tears rolling down my face as I looked out the passenger window of my dad's car. "You have a great skill, but to truly make it, to go to the next level takes discipline and practice, are you willing to give up everything to go to the next level?" I knew the answer to my dad's question, I wasn't willing. This might seem like my dad was being harsh with me, but up to this moment he had been my biggest support. And at this point in my life, I needed to hear the truth. He wasn't saying no to my dream, he was bringing in the reality. And at the age of 12, I knew, I wasn't going to be a professional baseball player. That was the moment I lost the feeling of being able to do whatever I want, and started to see the reality of where I want to go.

It's taken me many years since that conversation with my dad to realize that having a calling is like that. It's a long process that doesn't come over night. It is revealed to us in stages, long conversations, and practice. Finding your calling happens over time, not in a singular moment.

I'm probably not the best person to talk about calling, at least on paper. I have a degree in youth ministry. And yet, I work at a record label doing Digital Marketing. I have even worked in churches, but never in the youth department. I have spent more time building websites and writing marketing plans than planning youth retreats and playing games. And through this time I always felt like I was being patient, a time of growth and development was what I viewed it as. Never fully confronting my vocation as something different than what I studied in college. Until my 30th birthday started to approach and I asked the question we have all asked, "what am I going to do with the rest of my life?"

Vocation comes in stages. From the beginning stage of discovery, to when you finally become a master of your craft, each opportunity brings about more time to learn, grow, be stretched, figure out what you like, and get better. I can look back at the opportunities I have had that seemed to be nothing more than a job or task and yet, when I follow the thread of the various stages of vocation, I can see how each opportunity was molding me for my calling. Like the time I had a summer internship at a youth conference where I managed backstage and programming. Or the time I was a middle school teacher and was challenged to come up with creative ways to communicate stories I heard long before.

Most of us spend more time thinking about vocation then working on our vocation. My friend Jeff calls this the stage of apprenticeship and usually lasts up to 7 years. It's a time of growth and learning. It's a time of figuring out what we are good at and what we don't want to do. This apprenticeship time is quiet, sometimes lonely, and often times frustrating. The overwhelming feeling of not doing what you want to do seems to be the theme of this stage. Everything you do feels more like a task leading to frustration rather than an opportunity for the future. You do a lot of listening and watching rather than talking and doing. You wonder when your time will come? When will I be the one to lead? When will I hit my stride? Only to not find the answers.

Leonard Ravenhill said “the opportunity of a lifetime must be seized within the lifetime of the opportunity.” And living out opportunities is what we are doing. Opportunities don’t feel like steps to finding your vocation, but what I have learned is opportunities are the foundations to the calling that has been placed on each of us. They are the building blocks we step on as we walk through life. It’s easy to want to skip over these opportunities. To focus only on what gets us to our calling. But I would argue, each opportunity is a chance for us to learn about our calling.

In the times we are asked to do jobs we don’t want to do, we learn.  
In the process of finding a job, we learn.  
In the daily grind of work, we learn.  
In the void of answers, we learn.  
In the madness of others, we learn.  
In the chaos of a project, we learn.

Every day is an opportunity to work on our vocation or calling. You could be wondering what you are going to do with your life right out of college, or your early 30’s wondering what you will do with the rest of your life. But when you realize that vocation comes in stages and each stage has a different theme and development, we can begin to see every single moment as an opportunity to learn, grow, and develop.

This changes the way we approach our work, and even more so, our life. If we will approach every day as an opportunity to redeem it for the future, we will be free to live a life of being in our vocation. For we are called to make the most of what we have been given. Not focus on the dreams of our future, but to live in the every day moments we are presented with to get better, to learn more, to encourage others, and to do great work.

Vocation is not something we will ever obtain, but something we can strive after every day to find that what we are doing is what we were created to do. It all comes down to how you view your opportunities.

*Kyle Reed is involved with Digital Marketing at Sony Music/Provident. You can find Kyle online, [@kylereed](#), and at [thoughtsaboutnothing.com](#).*



# Your Will Be Done

**By Arleen Spenceley**

I am a Roman Catholic Christian. A “God person,” according to the not-so-into-God kid who called me that when we were students at the Protestant school I attended for fifth through twelfth grades.

Church is my jam. I pray. I underline stuff in the Bible. I believe that God is good, that providence is real, that Jesus is my homeboy – you know, the whole bit. So you can imagine my own surprise the night I realized that I had never actually wanted what God wants for me.

There are no typos in that sentence.

I sat curled up into a corner of my couch, thinking about my yet to be determined vocation: Should I find a dude to marry? Should I stay single? Maybe I should just become a nun.

And like usual, while I thought, I wondered: what if God asks me to be something I don't want to be? What if he wants me to do something I don't want to do? I sighed.

Your will be done, I prayed. But, I added, I'm kinda rootin' for a husband.

Then, no doubt by the grace of God, it dawned on me: My wanting what God wants for me had never had much depth.

In Catholicism, we acknowledge that God invites us each to one of three vocations: marriage, religious life (to become a priest or a nun, for instance), or consecrated single life (which implies perpetual single life for the sake of serving Christ).

But all my “your will be done” prayers until after that night, about my vocation or otherwise, had been intertwined with my heart's silent plea: but please let your will align with mine.

It became apparent to me that what I always actually had wanted was for what God wants for me to turn out to be what I've wanted all along. The gap between where I am and where I could be, spiritually speaking, looked bigger that night than it had the day before. But God didn't take long to begin to bridge it.

That part of my journey started at a Mass for which my diocese's bishop was the celebrant. During his homily, he told a story about Mother Teresa, whose heart opened at her confirmation, the bishop said. She wanted what God wanted for her, and she wanted it before she even knew what it was.

I want that, I realized. God used a story about a seed He planted in Mother Teresa's heart to plant a seed in mine. My heart's silent plea started to shift: I want to want what You want for me, even before I know what it is.

I want to mean it when I say “your will be done”—not to bargain, or beg for God to give me what I want outside his inspiration, but to seek what he wants because of who he is. To be willing to accept his invitation—whatever it is—because I trust him.

I thought, at first, that I didn't know how to get from anywhere to there. But God didn't take

long to remind me.

A couple nights later, I stumbled upon Psalm 37:4—a verse I had read a hundred times before: “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

But that night, I read the verse through different lenses. I got the sense, for the first time, that the verse does not imply that God will give you what you want because you’ve sought him first, or because you’re finally finding satisfaction in him.

Maybe, I realized, when we’ve sought Him first, he will give us the desires of our hearts—that is, he will provide us with them. What we want will be refined when what we are focused on is him.

And when we are focused on him, our wills finally will begin to align with his.

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# Calling Is a Verb

**By Cara Strickland**

When I was younger, the idea of a calling was so much easier. I remember youth group sermons and endless conversations about discerning your strengths and gifts in order to discover your calling.

It was scary, certainly. The idea was so weighty, so meaningful. It was as if my calling was carved into me somewhere, and I just needed to find that hidden place. I lived in fear of finding out that I was called to far away mission work, or (gasp) singleness.

In those days, calling was an immovable concept. It did not change, and could not be revoked. It was discerned and lived out over the course of a life.

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I've always loved the story of Samuel. It's such a wonderful example of the way that God finds people, even when they aren't looking for Him (even, as in the case of Samuel, when they are sleeping).

God calls to Samuel, audibly, it seems. It takes a few times for the reality of the situation to become clear to Samuel, and Eli, his guardian (and a priest of the Lord).

God speaks to Samuel, inviting him into a relationship of conversation. That concept might seem familiar now. We are used to the idea that God can speak to us and chooses to relate to us, but in those days, a relationship with God was rare. Words from Heaven were not freely given.

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I have given up listening for a call to the things that I would least like to do. I have given up checking boxes on spiritual gift forms, in order to discern my calling. Instead, I am listening for the invitations to engage with God in conversation. I am listening for the sound of God calling my name.

Conversation with God is messy. I don't always feel that I'm hearing things correctly (sometimes I have to ask three times or more, rather like Samuel). Sometimes I go for a long while without feeling that I've heard anything.

Sometimes I doubt that I have ever heard God at all.

But this complicated listening is now what I mean when I talk about calling. Rather than viewing a calling as something that belongs to me, something I can claim and hold, I think of it as something God does, something that becomes clear as I sidle up and listen, sometimes for quite a while.

Unlike the callings of my past, it might not be permanent, or become part of my identity. It might not even call upon my strengths. Neither do I feel that it is a job, or a vocation, though it might lead to that, sometimes. Gradually, I'm coming to terms that calling isn't about me, or what I can do for God. It's not about my resume. It's not about my time, energy or money.

Calling is a verb. Calling is a phone that I pick up, only to hear a voice I love on the other end. Calling is that moment when I hear my name shouted in the airport and I rush into familiar arms.

Not to say that calling is always comfortable. My conversations with God have led me to challenging places. I haven't blazed a trail into the mission field, leaving behind everyone and everything I know, but I have taken steps into looming unknowns.

Sometimes, like Samuel, I feel only a flood of information. God told Samuel about the evil ways of His people. What must it have been like to hear that sort of thing from God (who had never spoken to you before)? Samuel's only guidance came from Eli who told him to do whatever seemed best to him. What a terrifying prospect.

Occasionally, I miss the more certain days of my youth. I miss the multiple choice callings, and the way my life seemed to stretch before me, predictable and safe.

I don't miss my multiple choice God, predictable and safe and small. That God didn't root me to the spot as I listened to His voice. That God didn't send tingles down my spine when I picked up the phone. Now, the call comes, and I tremble a little when I hear the invitation. My response is often a request for the courage to accept.

*Cara Strickland is a writer, editor, and food critic in Spokane, Washington. She writes about food, feminism, and the way faith intersects life (among other things) on her blog [Little Did She Know](#).*

# When You Aren't Gifted, God Equips the Called

By Jonathan Pearson

***God calls people.***

It's one of the foundational understandings in scripture. Throughout the Old Testament, The Gospels, and the Epistles we see God calling people to do His work.

I don't understand why God would use people. All I know is that by his grace and wisdom He calls us to do eternity shaking, difference making, and life transforming stuff.

As I was wrestling with the call God placed on my life at an early age (I still wrestle with the specific calling and I pray I always will), one of the things I always heard was,

"Look how God has gifted you to find what He's called you to do."

I was told to take a spiritual gifts inventory and pray about whether or not God was calling me into "full time ministry." This is sound advice. There's nothing wrong with considering our passions and our gifts to some extent. However, one of the things I've learned as I've gotten a little older and wiser (hopefully) is that God doesn't always equip us before He calls us. In fact, He often doesn't equip us until after He's called us.

***We see countless examples of God equipping the called throughout the Bible.***

- Moses struggled with God because he lacked so many tools to do the work God called him to do. God equipped him along the way.
- Abraham was an old man when God placed the call on his life. God did the miraculous and equipped him for it.
- David had no real skills to be king. God called him out of his pasture and into the king's palace anyway.
- Jesus laid his divineness aside and followed God step by step in order to complete His call.
- Peter had a big mouth and struggled with His faith. God equipped him as he boldly declared the name of Jesus at Pentecost.

The list could be much more extensive. The point is this...

***Just because you don't feel currently equipped for the call you feel God is whispering in your ear doesn't mean you're hearing things.***

I believe with all of my heart that God gives gifts to us for the edification and growth of the Church. Sometimes, those come early on and before the call, but it seems to me like that people that shake eternity for Jesus are the ones that are willing to step out and say, "God, I need you because I don't have all the tools I need to do this." They're the ones God uses greatly.

***Don't wait on all the gifts to know if you're called. Just seek God's voice.***

*Jonathan Pearson is the Orangeburg Campus Pastor at Cornerstone Community Church and the author of Next Up.*

# On (A)vocation

By Jenelle D'Alessandro

To be honest, I don't have the hots for the word "calling," these days. Neither do I for its more chic Latinate sister, "vocation," from *vocare*—to call.

We have trouble with these words, because we've tended to toss them around like the well-worn bocce balls in my Uncle Anthony's backyard. We don't get any nearer to the meaning, because we're so often tossing the idea of "calling" so closely alongside hefty, confusing, bouldering facts. You may call these facts / life.

Consider this familiar self-talk formula:

<a> Invariably I must pay bills / debts / provide for my family / et cetera.

<b> My identity is so closely intertwined by this thing I do to accomplish <a>.

<c> Yet, AM I NOT MORE than just the sum of my doings? Ergo, I will pursue that THING I'm MEANT to do!\*

And then we are so often met with a formidable feedback loop that returns us back to the ruckus of responsibility in <a>.

\*Side commentary for another day: Millennials are more likely to pursue <c> with reckless abandon, perhaps with a certain purity that we all love to hate.

The issue for most of us, I think, is more one of avocation.

When I was a sophomore at UMBC, a brilliant nun named Sister Kathleen Feeley guest-lectured a 300-level course in our English department. She was in her 70s. She had long been president of the College of Notre Dame in Maryland, and we were more honored than we knew to receive her.

She stood at a lectern and rewarded us with accidental aphorisms, recited poetry and inspired a life lived closely to excellent books.

The bit I remember most from her course was when she said this:

**"There is vocation. And then, there is avocation."**

I don't quite remember all that she taught us about avocation, but I do know that she led me out on a search-party. That was 1998. I am still feeling the stone-questions ahead of me with my bare hands, and she helped invite me in to the mystery.

Avocation, etymologically-speaking, is a calling-away from somewhere. Let me urge you to overlook the terrible, terrible word the dictionary will tell you it means—a hobby, or a side-gig.

An avocation is not so pedestrian to be a side-thought to your vocation. No.

The beauty of avocation is that this is THE THING we give license to call us away to experience

things fresh. An avocation forces us to learn to see again.

Do you have something that you pursue that gives you permission to pause and truly look at your inner life? I do not mean to scroll the Instagram feed of your thoughts, as we mindlessly do between other things.

Do you have something that causes you look within your self and stretch out, to ask more expansive questions? Something urging you to see connections with the world, with the cosmos, with your horribly-moody neighbor/mother-in-law/sister/brother?

...Something urging you to make deeper connections, to be present, to love more heavy.

For Annie Dillard, it was writing. (She uses words better than most of us, so I defer to her speaking of these things in terms of a “calling”). Dillard pleads with us that once we find that thing - we must pursue it with a sort of violent love:

"Stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way...locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. This is yielding, not fighting...

I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you. Then even death, where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. Seize it and let it seize you up aloft even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in shreds, and let your very bones unhinge and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles" (Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*).

At the turn of the 20th century, Rilke wrote a series of letters to an aspiring poet that gives similar wisdom. Yet any of us could strike-through the word *artist* below, and ask what that thing is for our selves:

"I can't give you any advice but this: to go into yourself and see how deep the place is from which your life flows; at its source you will find the answer to the question...Perhaps you will discover that you are called to be an artist. Then take the destiny upon yourself, and bear it, its burden and its greatness, without ever asking what reward might come from outside" (Rainer Maria Rilke *Letters to a Young Poet*, book 1, trans. Stephen Mitchell).

If I can humbly insert myself into the community of Dillard and Rilke for a moment, it seems to me the most pressing issue for most of us is to make a commitment. What is that THING we long to do, the DOING that allows us to see different layers of our selves and our world—perhaps even of God?

Once we find the answer, we should allow it to call us away for a time. Even just for a period of thirty minutes, get called away from your smart phone and your TV. Get called away from the anxiety so rampant in our overly-fed American lives.

May you be a person of fierce avocation.

*Post-script: As of this writing, Sister Feeley, now 85, has left Baltimore to moonlight as a teacher at a university in Ghana. It seems she's been called away to something beyond her self: <http://archives.explorebaltimorecounty.com/news/99478/80-she-still-answers-her-calling/>*

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# A Prayer for the Work of God and Humanity

**By Paul J. Pastor**

*For prayer together, especially at times of planting and harvest.*

**Leader:** God of all, who at the beginning of all things declared your work in creation to be very good, look upon the work of our hands—our labor, career, and calling—and grant that we may be workers truly made in your image.

**People:** *Lord, hear us.*

**Leader:** We confess that we have failed in our work countless times; failed to love you and our neighbors, failed to love ourselves and the whole of creation. We have not seen the work of our hands as holy. We have not honored the earth or the balance of creation with our labor. We have exploited our brothers and sisters, both knowingly and unknowingly. We have worked according to the fall of our race, not according to the very good.

We humbly repent, and turn to the way of Jesus.

**People:** *Lord, forgive us.*

**Leader:** Show us a better way, the way that is old yet ever new, the way of the Father's good will, and the Son's word of creation, and the Spirit's sustaining of all things.

Teach us to work as you work, for the joy of your nature, the glory of your name, and the good of all creation.

**People:** *Lord, show us the way.*

**Leader:** Grant that we may work in keeping with your good and creative nature, for the redemption and re-creation of all things.

By your Spirit,

May our artists and writers make true and beautiful things, calling us to love through their imaginations.

May parents raise up children as if they were raising Christ, in patience and wisdom.

May those of us in public service work tirelessly for justice and the social good.

May those of us in service industries work with excellence, learning to love the kind and the unkind as Jesus would.

May all entrepreneurs find faith and success in their work, and seek to pioneer better ways of trade in our communities.

May business leaders seek to raise up those around them, giving away the honor that they receive, and find means of commerce that give to all, not profiting at the expense of others.

May craftsman express their excellence and individuality through their work, making and repairing the things that we depend on for life and comfort, and making such things beautifully.

May farmers and all who tend the earth do so with wisdom and skill, for the health of the land and the fruitfulness of the harvest.

May all clergy and workers in the church be blessed to empower Christians in the love of God and neighbor, and the making of disciples.

May all who struggle with unemployment, underemployment, or wrong employment know that you are with them. May they find comfort, and ways to contribute to the greater good with the time and skills you have given them.

In every good human endeavor, let us work with humility and true hearts, in the hope and vision of the kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grant that we may do all this, and teach others to do the same, for your pleasure and the good of the whole world.

**People:**      *Lord, grant our prayer*

**Leader:** Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing—in our homes, places of employment, neighborhoods, and everywhere that we go. Bless us that we may know you in whatever work our hands find to do. Lift up the forgotten, humble the proud of heart, encourage the weary, and remind us of your great work, that has never ceased from the beginning of creation.

**Together:**    *Our hands are yours.  
Our minds are yours.  
Our hearts are yours, O God.*

**Leader:** In the name of the Creator, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

**People:**            *Amen.*

*Paul J. Pastor is a writer, editor, and grassroots pastor living in Oregon's Columbia River Gorge.*

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