

Jesus is Calling, Will You Answer?

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October 29, 2023

Wouldn't it be something if we could talk to Jesus on the phone? Any time we had questions, needed guidance, or had an important decision to make, we could call, text, or message Jesus? Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work that way – but what if I told that Jesus does in-fact call us...it's just not with a phone. This morning we are going to explore this by looking at three specific ways Jesus does call us...

Part 1

First, is Jesus' call to discipleship. I love reading through the Gospels – I especially find it interesting seeing how Jesus talks and interacts with people. And as I study these encounters, I notice a repeated pattern of things Jesus does: 1) He *tells* people about the Kingdom of God and what it is like, 2) He *shows* people what life is like in the kingdom, and 3) He *invites* people to become part of the kingdom.

"Come, follow me"...this is an invitation Jesus extended to His twelve disciples, to others He encountered, and ultimately it is an invitation He extends to each one of us. It is an invitation...

- To experience the goodness and love of God
- To find freedom from sin, guilt, and death
- To abundant and eternal life
- To a life of purpose and meaning
- To belong to a community of believers
- To a new identity as children of God

These are but a few things we receive when we become Jesus' disciples. However, Jesus tells us in Luke 14 that there is a cost to be a disciple, and it's something we need to give serious consideration. In addition to the things I mentioned, Jesus is also inviting us...

- To faith and repentance
- To sacrifice and self-denial
- To love God and love our neighbour above ourselves
- To be gracious, merciful, and forgiving to those who hurt us
- To participate in the kingdom's mission of restoration and reconciliation
- To pursue righteousness and shun sin in all its forms

We need to be "all in" for Jesus – to submit every part of us and every area of our lives to His Lordship. Jesus asks a lot, but He offers us so much more. Ultimately, He asks us to let go of the things of this world – things that are corrupted, destructive, and perishing. Instead, He asks us to embrace the things of God – which are eternal, God-pleasing, and life-giving. When we accept the call of Jesus to discipleship, we become new people with a new identity. We then live out that new identity in faith and by the power of God's Spirit.

Part 2

A second calling of Jesus is a calling to serve. We find this calling all throughout the Bible, and here are just a few examples...

Mark 10:43-44 (NLT)

Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.

Galatians 5:13-14 (NLT)

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NIV)

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

This last passage highlights four important truths I want to focus on: 1) each of us receives different gifts, 2) they are given by God, 3) they are expressions of God's grace, 4) and we are to use our gifts to serve others.

Dr. Ken Radant is a professor of theology at Carey Theological College (where I took my Masters). Ken has also recently published a book called *Grace for Service*, and in it he elaborates on these four truths...

*"The Christian's 'grace for service' or 'ministry gifting' is the broad range of abilities and opportunities that God builds into each believer's life by His grace, uniquely equipping each of us to serve Him as Christ works through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. These ministry resources take many forms."*¹

*"Because God distributes these in different combinations, they might be called our 'portion' or 'share,' and they define our unique roles in the mutual ministry of Christ's body. Every gift we receive becomes a stewardship responsibility, since we are called not only to enjoy the benefits of Christ's ministry but also to share in that ministry ourselves. Every gift requires the enabling power of the Spirit if it is to bear fruit with eternal value, and every gift has the potential to manifest the Spirit's power."*²

¹ Ken Radant, *Grace for Service: An Exegetical Theology of the Spirit's Gifts for Ministry* (Wipf and Stock, Kindle Edition), p. 429.

² Ibid.

So, to summarize, as we accept the call of Jesus to discipleship, God gives us His Spirit and entrusts us with different giftings and abilities which we are to use in service of the kingdom. We minister in concert with other believers as we collectively make up the Body of Christ – seeking to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that is lost and hurting.

Each one of us is uniquely and graciously gifted by God's Spirit. What are your gifts? How are you using them? If you aren't sure what your gifts are, consider taking a spiritual gifts assessment, engage in some self-reflection, ask others what gifts they see in you, and of course pray for God to show you what He has blessed you with. Then, respond to Jesus' call to serve by putting those gifts to use – for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Part 3

The final calling of Jesus we will look this morning is a call to vocation – the idea that God calls specific people, to specific roles, at specific times. If we were in the Star Wars universe, this would be our “destinies.”

Throughout the Bible we see clear examples of God calling individuals to specific roles: Noah was commanded to build an ark, Moses was tasked with leading God's people into the Promised Land, Jonah was called to preach to the Ninevites, the twelve disciples were hand-picked by Jesus to be leaders in the church, and Paul was commissioned to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

When we read these stories, it seems so easy, right? There doesn't seem to be any indication that they struggled with hearing God's voice or understanding what they were supposed to do. And sometimes that's how God does it – He communicates in a clear and unmistakable way. There are other times, however, when God chooses to speak in more subtle ways, like the gentle whisper Elijah experienced in 1 Kings 19.

What do we do when things aren't very clear? How can we discern if God is calling us to something specific or discover what He would have us do in a given situation? I want to share some practical steps we can take...

Pray!

This seems like such an obvious thing...but how often is prayer the first thing we do when faced with a decision? How often do we persist and persevere in prayer – as the days, weeks, and months go by? And how often do we intentionally engage in listening prayer as we wait for God's response? God promises in James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” God is more than willing to give us the wisdom and insights needed to discern what to do... we just need to ask with expectant faith and patiently wait for the answer.

In addition to asking God for wisdom, we should also pray for a spirit of indifference. Probably not what you expected me to say.... But let me explain...

In her book *Pursuing God's Will Together*, Ruth Haley Barton describes this type of prayer as “ask(ing) God to make us indifferent to anything but the will of God relative to the matter (at hand).”³ She adds “we ask God for the grace to desire his will – nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.”⁴ As Jesus commands in Matthew 6:33, we must seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness above all else, trusting that He will provide everything we need.

Grow in Your Relationship With God

One of the amazing truths revealed in Scripture is that the God of all creation desires to have a relationship with us, and has gone to extraordinary lengths to make that possible. And like any other relationship, it requires of us an investment of effort and intentionality. Namely, we need to prioritizing spending time getting to know God by reading His Word and responding with prayer and worship.

As our relationship with God grows and deepens, we will begin to think more like Him, view things more like Him, and by God’s Spirit, act more like Him. Paul describes this transformation in Romans 12:2, adding that it will result in us being able to discern the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. This process is known as sanctification, and it takes time.

Talk to Trusted Godly People in Your Life

Having wise, godly, and trustworthy people in your life is invaluable, as they can support, encourage, and challenge you in your Christian walk. They can also provide insights, perspectives, and share wisdom from their own experience as you seek to understand and follow God’s will for your life.

Not only that, but it is also not uncommon for God to speak to us through other believers. During my ordination service in September, I shared how God spoke through my mom in a way that helped reveal His plan for me to be in pastoral ministry. It is important for us to be open to hear what God may be saying through others, and to learn how to listen to God together in community.

Consider What Gives You Joy

In some of the choices we have to make, it can be helpful to consider what gives us joy and what we are passionate about – for they may shed light on discerning the path God would have us take or what He is calling us to.

Frederick Buechner once said: “*The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*”⁵ In other words, God often calls us to do the things we passionately enjoy in order to serve the needs of those around us.

³ Barton, Ruth Haley, *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), p. 188.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quoted in Duffy Robbins, *Youth Ministry Nuts and Bolts: Organizing, Leading and Managing Your Youth Ministry, Revised and Updated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), p. 268.

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If, after all of these steps, you still have no sense of what option to take or what God may be calling you to do, perhaps we need to consider the possibility that God doesn't have a particular outcome in mind in that situation. Perhaps in God's sovereignty, He has brought together these options and paths, and is now leaving the decision to us in our free will. Perhaps all the options are equally good, and each option will be pleasing to Him and centred in His will. Something to think about.

Then, it is time to step out in faith in the direction we perceive think God is calling us. If we are genuinely seeking God's will, and somehow start down the wrong path or make the wrong decision, I believe that God in His sovereignty will let us know in some way. We see this in the life of Paul. He was called to be a missionary and an apostle to the Gentiles, and he went about going place to place talking to various groups. But it says in Acts 16:7 that as he was about to enter Bithynia that the Spirit would not allow him to do so. Now the text doesn't describe how exactly that came about, but the message is clear: as we rely on God and act in obedience, He will direct and correct our steps as needed.

The key is to genuinely desire to follow the call of God in each step, and in each decision. We need to actively and continually seek to follow God's will, and not do our own thing and ask God to add His blessing to our will.

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As we have seen this morning, Jesus is calling each and every one of us – He is calling us to follow Him as His disciples, to serve one another with our gifts, and to seek and obey His will in decisions about our lives. And the question I want to leave you with is: will you answer the calls?