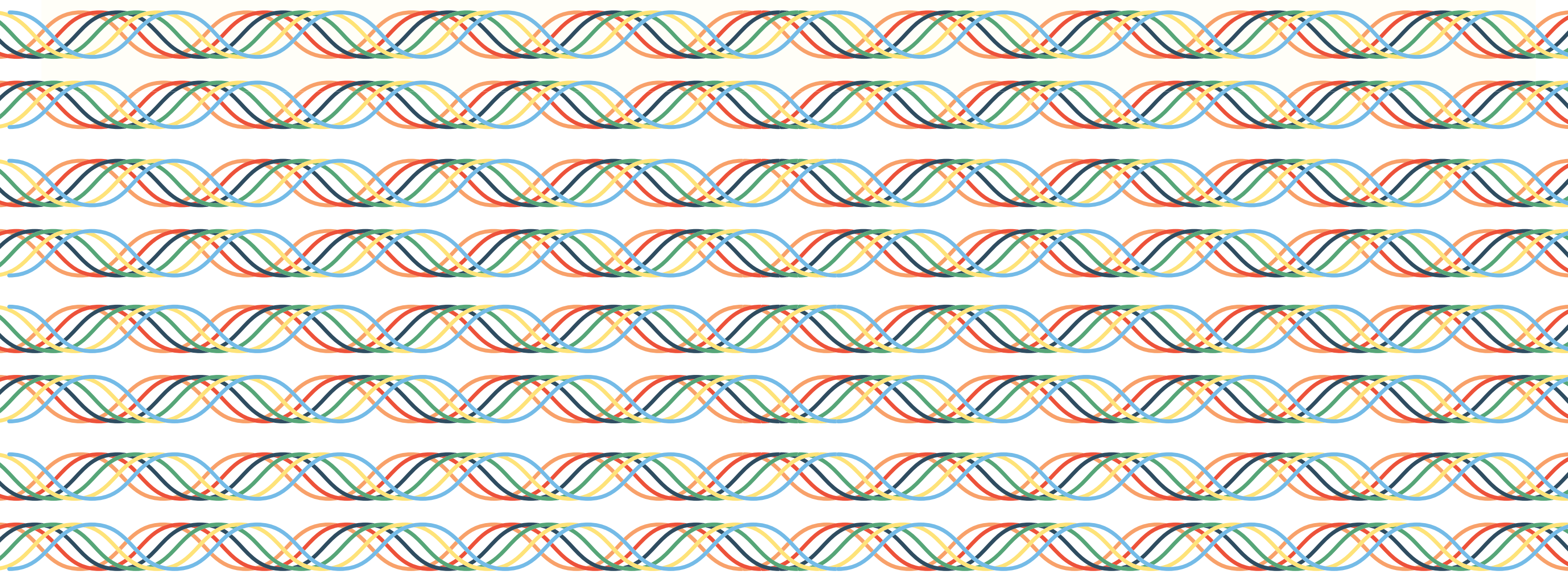




THE SHAPE OF CALLING

A GUIDED REFLECTION
ON
DISCERNING THE CALL
OF GOD



"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well"

- Matt 6:33



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Produced by Officer Recruitment, Australia

Written by Christopher Trodden

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2nd Edition

Discerning a calling from God takes time. On your journey of discernment, it is helpful to invite other leaders around to help you process, provide honest feedback, encouragement, and a spiritual perspective. If you would like to speak to someone about sensing a call to ministry in The Salvation Army specifically, please contact us: candidates@ebc.edu.au or at: www.salvationarmy.org.au/comealive/contact-us

All Scripture references in the main text are from the New International Version (NIV) unless stated otherwise. Scripture references are included for consideration and reflection. We have prayerfully selected an arrangement of verses with the intention of adding clarity and context. Please note, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all relevant Scripture.

For more information

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What is Calling?

What do we mean when we use the word calling? Calling is a bit of a loaded word - it can be a helpful word for some, but for others, the idea of calling can be confusing and raise questions like:

- What is calling?
- Does everyone have a calling?
- How does calling occur?
- How do I respond to a calling?
- Do all callings look the same?

Commonly in a church setting when the word calling is mentioned, it is often used in reference to people going into fulltime ministry. You may have heard comments like "God called me into ministry when I was a teenager" or "I've had a sense of calling for a long time now". Or maybe someone's asked you "What's your calling?" or inquired of you "Have you ever thought about going into ministry?"

You may have heard Christians express their understanding of calling as:

- "Where you see yourself in the future"
- "How and where I fit in the Body of Christ"
- "A sense of purpose"
- "Using the gifts and talents God gave me to serve"
- "Something, someone, somewhere God has placed on my heart to minister to"
- "Being a Christian in a world that is lost and needs Jesus".

Some people are motivated by a sense of responsibility they get from reading Scripture and express calling as:

- "The need is the call", or
- "The Bible teaches us about responding to injustice, so calling is simply an act of obedience", or
- "It's a growing desire in your heart to do something you feel God wants you to do. And no matter how hard you try and shake it, you can't stop that sense that there's something more, something drawing you, something that you need to do – that's calling".

These, and many more expressions of calling are all valid. And each one adds to the overall picture of what calling can be.

A WORKING DEFINITION

The word calling (Greek: *kaléo*) means: to be spoken to, to be invited, or to be summoned.

So we could say,

**"Calling refers to the activity of God, whereby God asks, draws, motivates,
or invites us to do something or to go somewhere"**



"Calling is an invitation offered to us by God"



A BIG PICTURE VIEW OF CALLING

When the topic of calling comes up, it's often linked to how it's understood and applied to ministry context, and that is appropriate. However, it's also helpful to keep the bigger picture of calling in mind.

There is an order to calling in Scripture which is important for us to cultivate:

1 First, we are called **To Christ**:

- Jn 1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.
- Jn 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".
- Acts 2:21 "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved".

Jesus is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, it starts with Him, it ends with Him. We cannot make a false idol out of calling or our activity for God. We are saved by God's grace, not by our works. We are called to be children of God first.

2 Second, we are called to **Be**:

- 1 Jn 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.
- 1 Peter 2:19 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Growing in Christ-like character is fundamental to keeping our spiritual walk healthy. The demands of ministry life often, counterintuitively, distract us and pull us away from spending time with God. Before we are called to do, we are called to be – to be with God. We are dependent upon God's redemptive power and grace to empower us to be Salt and Light in this world. All ministry is empowered by, and flows from, the intentional time we spend with God.

Third, we are called to **Do**:

- ### 3
- Micah 6:8 (NLT) "O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God".
 - Matt 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again. It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven".
 - Jam 2:14-17 "What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So, you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless."

CALLING IS ABOUT BEING RESPONSIVE TO GOD'S PLAN

SHINING LIGHTS

Scripture makes it clear that God intends for us to be the light of Jesus for others:

- In our daily lives,
- In our workplaces,
- In our communities,
- In our street and to our neighbours,
- In our family, friendship, and social circles.

We've all been called by God to share the love of Jesus with everyone – we're not meant to hide that love away. Jesus goes on to say, "No one lights a lamp and hides it under a bed" (Matt 5:15). We are all called to share the love of Jesus with others.

A COMMON THREAD

No matter what definition we land on, for each one of them, calling requires a response from us.

REFLECTIONS

What is your definition of calling:

What is 1 or 2 key lessons you gained from this chapter:

List the ways you like to spend time with God:

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[illegible]



Throughout Scripture, we can identify two categories that calling fits into 1) the general call, and 2) a specific calling. Both are equally important and needed for the work of God's kingdom. Let's explore them together.

THE GENERAL CALL

Scripture informs us that we all share in the general call – that is, our Christian witness. We see this outlined by Jesus through the **Great Commandment** and the **Great Commission**.

The Great Commandment

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 22:37-9). "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

The Great Commission

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20).

The New Testament promotes the idea of "the priesthood of all believers", which is to say everyone has equal access to God, and everyone has equal opportunity to be involved in ministry. It's not for the chosen few - we are all called to come alongside others and share the love of Jesus with the lost, the last, and the least.

To live out the gospel, to reveal the kingdom of God, to partner with God, to bring hope, restoration, life; to live, love and fight alongside others – this is the general call of ministry we share and outwork in our daily lives as followers of Christ. We don't need to wrestle with this - we all have a part to play in God's kingdom.

A SPECIFIC CALLING

We also read in Scripture that God calls people to specific tasks, roles, locations, and ministry functions. In the Old Testament, we see God calling:

- Abraham to start a nation
- Moses to deliver a nation
- Deborah to lead a nation
- David to rule a nation
- Esther to save a nation
- And the prophets to speak to a nation.

However, these are all pretty big and unique examples of callings and can be hard to relate to. Are there any examples of more "common" callings we might be able to relate to easier?

Thankfully, we also read about God giving specific calls to more common day works: working with crafts (Exo 35:30-35, 36:1), to be musicians (1 Chron 15:16), to hold secular jobs (Dan 1:3-5), to be involved in social reform (Neh 13:1-31).

In the New Testament, we read about God calling people aside to a specific ministry function. We read about specific and different callings in Ephesians 4:11-12,

**“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,
the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service,
so that the body of Christ may be built up”**

We can think of,

- John the Baptist – called to prepare the way for Jesus (Lk 3:4-6),
- Priscilla – called to be a teacher of teachers (Acts 18:26, Rom 16:4),
- Phoebe – called as a minister in the church of Cenchreae (Rom 16:1),
- Junia – called to be an apostle for Christ (Rom 16:7),
- Timothy – called and graced as a local church pastor (2 Tim 2:15).

Though we all share in a general call to be Christ’s ambassadors, there are specific callings that God graces us with.

A NOTE ON SPECIFIC CALLS

- 1 Though we read about specific callings, it’s wise to acknowledge that while the call might be specific and clear, the outworking of it (how it unfolds and develops) is rarely straight forward.

Take Paul the apostle for example. He was called to “be a light to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:47). But what did this look like practically in his life? Not one role or setting or task, but many. At times, he was an evangelist, a church planter, an author, a teacher, a travelling itinerant preacher, a tent-maker, a theologian. He had a specific calling, but not a specific outworking.

- 2 Another point to remember is that calling isn’t just about finding the one right task or area to serve God through, it’s about being available for God. It’s about cultivating a heart that is willing to follow after where God is leading. It’s about responding to what God is doing and joining God’s mission.

- 3 There are times when a specific calling serves as a wonderful anchor for our soul. Clarity around your calling will help you persevere through challenging situations. But God is always doing new things. There are times when God will expand your idea, and even the very nature, of your specific calling. Why? To open your heart up to explore new options and increase your vision to consider different opportunities and ministry appointments. Again, think about Paul - he had a specific calling, but not a specific outworking.

**"We cannot have a fixed mindset, calling is not static,
it's about being available for God"**

The Shape of Calling

When it comes to pursuing our calling, one of the assumptions we may inadvertently hold onto is that once we discover what or where God is calling us to, from that point on it is relatively straight forward.

But when you read Scripture, one of the patterns you'll notice is that a specific calling rarely has a precise and predictable unfolding. Let's consider the apostle Paul. He had a specific calling to "be a light to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:47) and spread the good news to all the nations. Essentially, he was an itinerant preacher.

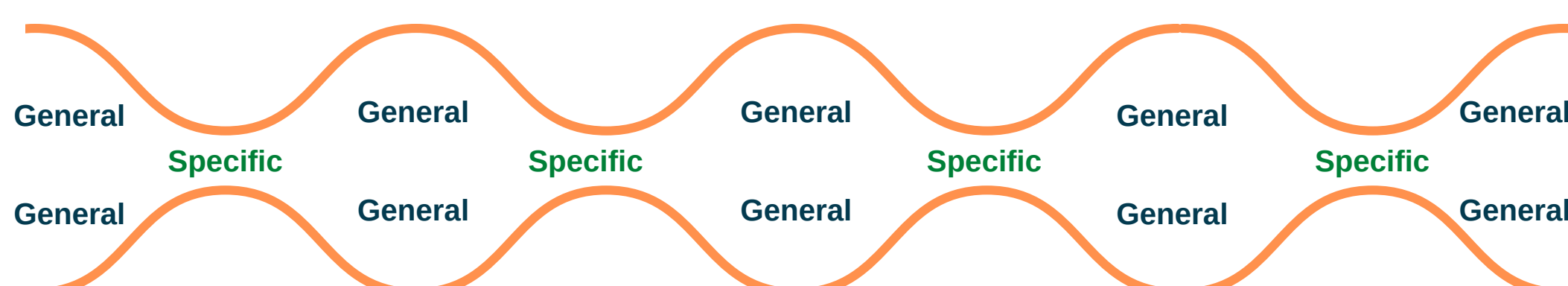
Fairly straight forward: open your mouth and speak. But what did this look like? How did this calling unfold?

Not in one ministry expression, but many. Not one ministry appointment, but several:

- He first went and studied for three years (Gal 2:17-18), then
- He was a teacher in a local church (Acts 11:25-26), then
- He was a missionary, evangelist and church planter (Acts 13-20), then
- He was an apologist, defending the faith in Rome (Acts 28), then
- He was a teacher for the Church (Epistles), and finally
- He was an author (Epistles in the New Testament).

Paul had a "specific" calling, but not a specific outworking or predictable ministry. It's the same for us. There is a flow and rhythm to calling, just as there is a flow and rhythm to ministry. It moves in and out, in and out, broad then narrow, broad then narrow, general to specific, general to specific – and this flow continues on throughout our life.

It might be helpful for you to imagine the "shape of calling" to be a wave:



How do we experience the 'wave-of-calling' in our own life? It's different for everyone. Here's a possible scenario:

We begin serving God in the same general way we are all called to serve God: The Great Commandment and Commission. We share the gospel with everyone: every tribe, every nation, every age, every gender, every background – everyone.

Then over time, we get an idea of how God has gifted us: our skills and our talents, and we work at developing our specific gifts.

Then, as our vision and capacity expand, ministry opportunities open up to us in many various ways and settings.

Then, as we grow in clarity of where God is leading us, we make specific choices to prepare us for the next season: we may go to school, or do a short course, or attend training college. We might join a ministry team, go on a team roster, serve in corps leadership, or go on a mission trip.

Then, over time, we may end up in another ministry setting, or appointment, or job, or team, doing our best to outwork the Great Commandment and Great Commission.

When it comes to a specific calling, it is helpful to hold our expectations loosely and foster an attitude around remaining open, responsive, and available for God no matter what that looks like or how it may unfold.

REFLECTIONS

Do you think God has a specific calling for you, if yes, write down what it is:

Create a timeline of your life and note specific milestones and events. Reflect on:

- What ministries or mission expressions have you been involved in.
- Time of learning or study.
- Key life experiences.
- Times God has led you.
- Moments you felt the Lord communicate with you.

NOTES



Responding to a Call

Now that we have defined calling as an invitation offered to us by God, and acknowledging that there is a difference between a general and specific calling, the next topic that we can consider is how do we respond to such an invitation?

Do we simply have to say yes, or is there more to it than that? And what influences our decision-making ability that allows us to either embrace, or reject, God's call? How do we discern if the call is even from God or simply our own desires at work? How do we make the right decision? Better yet, do we even have a decision to make when it comes to calling? And what if we make the wrong decision, what happens then? Is it two strikes and you're out?

1 OUR DECISIONS ARE SHAPED BY THE IMAGE OF GOD WE CARRY

Have you ever wrestled with any of the following questions when it comes to responding to calling:

- "What if I don't want to go/move to where God is calling me?"
- "Am I cut out for this?"
- "What if I don't want to do this type of ministry?"
- "Will I be stuck with second best for my life if I don't pursue it?"
- "What if I choose wrong?"
- "What if I say yes but don't like the ministry?"
- "Can calling change over time?" or
- "What if I can't follow the call at this moment in my life, does that mean I will miss out?"

Our answers to these questions are heavily influenced by how we perceive God and what we believe God's reaction will be towards the decisions we make. In turn, this creates an idea - an image we hold onto, be it mentally, emotionally, or spiritually speaking - of whom we understand God to be. The overarching point is this: holding onto an incorrect image and understanding of God will often result in making unhealthy choices, whereas a healthy image of God will result in making healthy decisions.

Let's look at three common false and incorrect images of God and how they influence our decision-making, followed by three positive images of God and their flow-on effect.

**Our decisions are shaped by
the image of God we carry.**

RECONCILING FALSE IMAGES OF GOD

NEGATIVE IMAGES OF GOD AND HOW THEY IMPACT OUR DECISION-MAKING

a) Authoritarian without Empathy

This image paints God as a distant figure who is only interested in accomplishing ministry objectives. Although God may speak to us at times or dispense calling, there isn't much care or consideration given to our circumstances or our dreams and desires.

If we hold onto this view, then we may feel God doesn't value our family, friends, or support structures in our lives. As a result, we may end up feeling angry or resentful towards God or carrying bitterness or mistrust in our hearts towards God.

b) A Stern Judge

Some of us hold to the image that God is a stern judge, waiting to announce His verdict on us. This creates a subconscious belief of needing good works for salvation and acceptance. This may play out in your decision-making process in the following ways:

- We only have one chance to get it right - so we may rush instead of entering into a time of discernment.
- Calling comes through a defining moment in time or experience, rather than a process developed in relationship. Without a two-way relationship, we may feel disempowered and make decisions blindly without taking the time to process our feelings or fears.
- In our desire to please God, we may cut off the voices of others that could bring perspective and help guide us to make wise choices.

c) Conditional Love

We may base our relationship with God on more of a transactional basis. Sometimes we unknowingly set conditions of the call. For example, if God does this for me, I will follow Him. Or, if God calls me to this place, or provides me with this opportunity, then I'll go. Or, we may hold onto the belief that we need to always please God in order to receive his love and acceptance.

If we hold onto this view, then our choices will be heavily influenced by the need to feel accepted, loved, and liked by God. If we fail to respond to God quickly, we may worry that we've disappointed Him or feel cut-off from Him in some way. In this case, we ultimately end up making decisions out of a place of fear rather than peace.

POSITIVE IMAGES OF GOD

a) Authority with Compassion

God is our supreme authority, but God never removes our free will or sets out to harm us. We are not merely a resource that God uses to accomplish His plans. Scripture tells us that we are God's children, co-heirs and co-labourers with Christ.

God values us and the support structures He has brought into our lives. And if we find ourselves called to a new environment, God will grow what He has already established and continue to provide support and community for us to flourish. This will help us trust Him and ultimately guide our decision-making process.

Meditate on these verses:

- He is the God who pursues us (Psalm 23:6).
- He is the God who will guide us (Phil 3:15).
- He is the God who loves us (Jn 3:16).
- He is our loving heavenly Father (Rom 5:7-11).
- He is the God who gives good gifts (Jer 29:11-13, Lk11:9-13, Gal 5:1, Jms 1:17).

God empowers us with choice.

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b) The Graceful Judge

Scripture does tell us that God will judge every person. But Scripture also reveals that God is a graceful judge and sent Jesus to forgive our sins and be our saviour. God's default setting isn't one of condemnation, but one that seeks to draw all people into relationship with Him. God also knows that life is challenging and reveals Himself as our helper.

With this view in mind, we are empowered by a more accurate image of God, one that understands God is for us, and not against us. God has a heart full of love towards us and comes alongside us in a supportive manner. This image of God enables us to be more vulnerable with God in prayer, relying more on His grace and strength to make the right decision.

Meditate on these verses:

- And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate (helper) to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth (Jn14:16-17).
- But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation (Rom 5:8-9).
- Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:14-6).
- Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (Jms 4:8).

c) A God of unconditional love

Jesus came to reveal God's heart and attitude towards us (Jn 1:18, 14:9). God's deepest desire is to be in a life-giving, loving relationship with us.

If we know that God accepts us, loves us, values us, cares for us, then we can make decisions out of a place of peace, security, and joy. Knowing this empowers us to try - and if we fail - to try again. If we feel we need more time to discern God's will, we won't feel rushed or pressured to make a hasty decision, because we trust God will still bless us.

Obedience and steps of faith are much easier when we operate from that state of internal peace. It is simply a natural response to the goodness of God.

Meditate on these verses:

- Everyone who honors your name can trust you, because you are faithful to all who depend on you (Ps 9:10).
- What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:21).
- When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put the ways of childhood behind me (1 Cor 13:11).
- Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3).
- There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear (1 Jn 4:18).

A few images of God to reflect on:

- Creator (Gen 14:19), Father (Psa 89:26), Deliverer (Psa 40:17), A Parent (Hos 11:3-4), The Path of Life (Psa 16:11), Gardener (Jn 15:1), A Place of Refuge (Isa 4:6) Fortress (Psa 59:16), Mighty in battle (Psa 24:8), Holy (Lev 11:44), A Shield (Psa 18:2,30), Mother Bear (Hos 13:8), Comforter (2 Cor 1:3), A Woman in labor (Isa 42:14), A Midwife (Psa 22:9-10), A nursing Mother (Num 11:12-13, Isa 49:15), Master (Mal 1:6, Matt 23:8), A Mother Eagle (Deut32:10-12) Water (Isa 55:1, Jn 7:38-39), The Strength of my life (Psa 27:1), Faithful (Deut 7:9), Light (Psa 27:1, 1 Jn 1:5), Strong Tower (Prov 18:10), Love (1 Jn 4:8,16).

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- There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear (1 Jn 4:18).

A few images of God to reflect on:

- Creator (Gen 14:19), Father (Psa 89:26), Deliverer (Psa 40:17), A Parent (Hos 11:3-4), The Path of Life (Psa 16:11), Gardener (Jn 15:1), A Place of Refuge (Isa 4:6) Fortress (Psa 59:16), Mighty in battle (Psa 24:8), Holy (Lev 11:44), A Shield (Psa 18:2,30), Mother Bear (Hos 13:8), Comforter (2 Cor 1:3), A Woman in labor (Isa 42:14), A Midwife (Psa 22:9-10), A nursing Mother (Num 11:12-13, Isa 49:15), Master (Mal 1:6, Matt 23:8), A Mother Eagle (Deut32:10-12) Water (Isa 55:1, Jn 7:38-39), The Strength of my life (Psa 27:1), Faithful (Deut 7:9), Light (Psa 27:1, 1 Jn 1:5), Strong Tower (Prov 18:10), Love (1 Jn 4:8,16).

1 OUR DECISIONS ARE SHAPED BY THE IMAGE OF GOD WE CARRY [CONTINUED...]

The Apostle Peter will serve as a good guide for us to reflect on when it comes to responding to the call of God. Not because he is some sort of spiritual giant that never made a mistake. Actually, as we study Peter's life, we'll see just how normal he was. We look to Peter because of the many up's and down's he had on his journey of discipleship. We will see that as Peter's understanding of God changed and matured, so did his responses.

LESSONS FROM PETER

Peter's story in Scripture is fascinating because we glean some insights of how his perceived image of Jesus, and therefore God, shaped his actions,

- Peter starts off with a traditional 'Jesus-as-Rabbi' image. That is why his response to following Jesus was so quick. We read, "straightaway Peter left his nets and followed him" (Mk 1:16-20). In that culture, it was a great honour to be picked by a Rabbi. At this early stage in his journey, Peter's choice was heavily shaped by culture.
- Sometime later, we see Peter's responses were informed by holding onto a 'Jesus-as-the-miracle-worker' understanding. With this image of Jesus in his mind, Peter's rationale was most likely "if you are the Jesus I know, then I will be able to do what you say", or, to put it another way, "If you call me to walk on water, then I will" (Matt 14:22-33).
- Further on down the track, Peter's image of Jesus was dramatically altered. One day on a mountain, Peter saw Jesus transformed into pure light and heard the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (Matt 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, Lk 9:28-36). Even after 30 years, Peter still refers to this event and the profound impact it had on his life. It became an anchor for his apostolic teaching and his reason to put faith in the hope of Christ's future return (2 Peter 1:16-18).
- As time went on, Peter would later reframe his understanding of Jesus to be that of the "architect of the soon to be New Testament church" (Matt 16:16). And in time, Peter would choose to dedicate his life to the strengthening of the church (Gal 2:9).
- When Jesus washed the disciple's feet (Jn 13:1-17), Peter began to understand the humble leader Jesus was.
- When he perceived Jesus to be Israel's saviour, Peter was willing to fight for Jesus and all he stood for (John 18:10-11).
- And then, on the day of Pentecost, Peter would stand up to declare, "God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36).

From these examples, we can see a narrative emerging of whom Peter understood Jesus to be and the impact this image had on his decision-making:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • "As a Rabbi, where you go, I go", | • "As a humble leader, I too will practice servant |
| • "As a miracle worker, I can experience miracles also", | leadership", |
| • "As the Son of God, I will lay my life down for you", | • "As the saviour, I will act boldly", |
| • "As the cornerstone of the church, I will pass on your | • "As the Messiah, I will worship you". |
| teachings", | |

Another example is the Apostle Paul. In his early years as Saul the Pharisee, he persecuted the church. But when his understanding of who Jesus was changed, all of his actions changed as well. No longer did he threaten the church, he dedicated his life to helping the church and defending the teachings of Jesus. What we learn from all of this is that who we perceive God to be will influence and govern our entire life. In short, our responses and the decisions we make are heavily influenced by the image of God we carry.

REFLECTION EXERCISE #1

Considering that our understanding or image of God influences our decision-making, reflect on the following questions, or discuss them with a mature Christian leader:

- 1) What image comes to mind when you think about God?
- 2) Meditate on those qualities and characteristics of God.
- 3) How do those characteristics and qualities of God influence the way you:
 - a) Relate, or don't relate, to God?
 - b) Lead or relate to those around you?
 - c) Make decisions?

2 WE DON'T ALWAYS MAKE WISE CHOICES

Have you ever made a decision you regretted? If so, welcome to the human race! We all have. We all make mistakes and poor choices from time to time. One of the concerns emerging leaders tend to have is "What if I chose wrong?" or "God called me, but I said no - so now I don't know what I'm supposed to do?" or "I heard the call but I said no".

If you can relate to this, I encourage to say out loud, "God will never give up on me"!

LESSONS FROM PETER

a) We can still say yes, even if we've said no

Even though Peter was hand-picked and discipled by none other than Jesus himself, Peter still made mistakes. He had heard excellent teaching, walked on water, and witnessed Jesus do the most incredible things – but he still didn't get it right all the time.

On that fateful night when Jesus was betrayed, Peter publicly denies Jesus three times (Matt 26:69-75, Mk 14:66-72, Lk 22:54-62, Jn 18:15-27). Sometime after this, we find Peter out fishing again as he was when Jesus first called him (Lk 5:1-11, Jn 21:3-7).

What we see happen next is truly encouraging, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him three times (Jn 21:15-19). We miss the significance of this in our English translations, for when we use the word 'love' it is usually only with one meaning. But in this section, Jesus and Peter use two different words for love, and they both have different meanings:

- Jesus uses the Greek word *agape*, meaning heartfelt love.
- Peter can only bring himself to use the Greek word *philo*, meaning dear friend, brotherly love, kind affection.

Watch what happens,

Jn 21:15-19

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love (*agape*: heartfelt love) me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love (*philo*: dear friend, brotherly love, kind affection) you."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love (*agape*: heartfelt love) me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*philo*: dear friend, brotherly love, kind affection) you."

On the third time, Jesus matches the word Peter uses for love,

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love (*philo*: dear friend, brotherly love, kind affection) me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you (*philo*: dear friend, brotherly love, kind affection)."

We read that Peter was hurt by Jesus' questioning. He knew that he had denied Jesus three times. Now Jesus asks Peter the same question three times. Was Jesus trying to rub it in, "*You made a mistake Peter ... I know ... you know... the disciples know ... but I want to remind you of it anyway?*" Of course not - Jesus wasn't trying to hurt Peter, he was trying to heal him.

In using the word for love that Peter is using, Jesus meets Peter where he is at emotionally. At that moment, a guilt-ridden Peter can't say he has that undying heartfelt love for Jesus (agape) because he's being reminded that he denied Jesus three times. Jesus, knowing the struggle in Peter's heart, uses the same word for love Peter uses to speak to him on his level.

Jesus was reinstating Peter, swapping his 3 denials with 3 new opportunities to confirm his love and allegiance. Rather than being frozen at a point-in-time where he failed, Jesus was trying to communicate to Peter that if he could focus on loving Jesus right then and there, at that moment in time, on that day, there was another chance waiting for him:

19 Jesus then says to Peter, "Follow me!"

Peter's mistake didn't cut him off from God's plan. If you have ever felt like you missed your calling or made the wrong choice, you can still pursue and embrace what Jesus has for you. You can always say yes to God's plan today, even if you have said no to it in the past.

Revelation 3:7 says, "What door God opens, no one can shut". That includes us. God will continually invite us into His mission. And God will meet us where we're at like Jesus did with Peter, we don't need to be perfect or have it all together.

Who you are now, right now, is enough for God to work with. You may feel like you have failed in the past, but if you make a decision today to embrace where God is leading you now, that's all God needs to move afresh in your life. God will continue to call us and walk with us. Jesus didn't give up on Peter, and he won't give up on you either.

b) Some lessons are harder to learn than others

We often celebrate Peter's boldness on the Day of Pentecost. He went from a denier of Jesus to standing up in front of a large crowd proclaiming the gospel to thousands! It's fantastic, Peter has made it! He's full of the Holy Spirit, so it's nothing but victorious living right?

Well, around 8 or 10 years after Pentecost, we see Peter denying his association with the new Gentile believers (Gal 2:11-14). Scripture says he was afraid of being seen with them and withdrew from fellowshiping with them in presence of other Jewish believers (Gal 2:12).

It's pretty astounding when you think about it. In Acts chapter 10, while praying, Peter fell into a trance (vs.10), saw heaven open before him (vs. 11), and heard the voice of God (vs. 13-14). And this happened, you guessed it, three times!

But even after the most incredible spiritual experience, he made a very similar mistake. Instead of denying Jesus, he's now denying the Gentiles.

This highlights another important principle: just because we have a clear idea of our calling, it doesn't mean that we'll never make a mistake. Or make that same mistake again.

We take our humanity, in all its frailty, with us – wherever we go. We need to make room for the fact that we are all human, and at times, we make poor choices. But if we surround ourselves with godly people who can speak into our lives, we can grow through our mistakes and make better choices in the future.

REFLECTION EXERCISE #2

a) At times we make wrong decisions. How can we minimise this from happening? Reflect on the following verses:

- God will lead us if we're open to being corrected (Phil 3:15).
- There is wisdom in the multitude of counsellors (Prov 11:14, 15:22).
- It's good practice not to make a decision in isolation (Acts 15:28).

b) Some lessons are harder to learn than others, and we need the guidance of other leaders to help us. We can see how Peter had to have someone else speak into his life to help him stay on track. We would be wise to learn from this and proactively seek out wise people:

- wise spiritual mentors know you; your gifts, desires, your heart for God.
- wise spiritual mentors can discern common themes and patterns God is building into your life.
- wise spiritual mentors lead an exemplary life.

Note: Being accountable to wise leaders does not replace your intimacy with God, there are no shortcuts. Also, when it comes to discerning calling, a wise leader provides affirmation to what you are sensing. If you receive advice or direction that doesn't confirm what God is already doing or does not line up with Scripture, don't act on it.

3 OUR DECISIONS ARE OURS TO MAKE

We tend to focus a lot on discerning God's voice when it comes to calling, but there is another voice we must consider, and that is our own. What are our desires? What do we want to do? Do we understand our strengths, weaknesses, and the areas we need to grow in? Do we know what our expectation of ministry is? Even though we may feel daunted or scared by the challenges that lie ahead, do we feel excited to serve God?

Fundamental to our whole decision-making process is knowing that we follow a God who empowers choice. God could have easily created us without free will and without the ability to choose. But God doesn't want to control us, He invites us into a life-giving relationship with Him. And in this relationship, we cannot abdicate our role and responsibility in making decisions.

Consider the following stories:

- In Genesis chapter 2 and 3, humankind was created with free will, the ability to choose between right and wrong.
- In Deuteronomy 30:19, God gives Israel a choice to make: choose life or choose death. Like in the garden, God knows the harmful consequences of the wrong choice, but God did not remove the gift of free will.
- In the Book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, did not know if they would be protected from the fire but they chose to worship God regardless (Dan 3:16-18).
- In the story of Esther, we learn that her life was on the line if she went into the king's court uninvited (Est 4:11). But Esther chose to act, despite not knowing the outcome (Est 4:14,16).

Calling does not eliminate our personal choice. It may challenge us and what we were planning, but God always honours the free will He gave us. God allows us to choose.

Let's look at Jesus.

On the way to the cross, Jesus had a legion of angels at his disposal which could have rescued him from his suffering at any time (Matt 26:53). But instead, Jesus chose to submit His will to God's will. He chose God's will over his own (Lk 22:42).

Jesus said, "Take up your cross and deny yourself" (Mk 8:34-5), but He also said, "If you lose your life for my name's sake, you will find it" (Matt 10:39).

It can be difficult to submit to God's will, especially when it's a defining life choice. The choice to follow God is ours and ours alone to make. No one can make that decision for us, not our family, not our friends, not our leaders, not even God, only us. But be encouraged, when you make a decision to follow God, you are ultimately choosing life.

LESSONS FROM PETER

Peter's journey shows us that in pursuing God, we don't lose our humanity, it is renewed. We don't lose our ability to make decisions (even bad ones) but can be guided by the Holy Spirit. We refer to this as spiritual formation, the process of maturing spiritually and growing closer to the likeness of Jesus.

A calling to Jesus is a calling to grow individually as a person. In fact, the word disciple literally means *a learner*. To follow Jesus is to enter into a life of radical growth, with kingdom values that inform our decisions.

"Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task" - 1 Timothy 3:1

Perhaps this is why, just before his death, Peter writes a letter that focuses on spiritual formation,

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:5-8).

Some people hold to the view that we need to be mature before we enter the ministry. Others believe ministry matures us, so it's best to just dive in. New Testament theologian N. T. Wright states, "Calling leads to formation and formation leads to calling". That is to say, as we pursue formation, calling shall emerge. And if we are called, we must engage in spiritual formation.

"Calling leads to formation and formation leads to calling"

The Apostle Paul said,

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:1-2).

Spiritual formation is at the heart of decision making. It's how we become more like Christ and how we can make decisions that please God.

REFLECTION EXERCISE

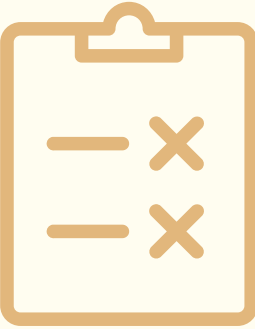
One day, Jesus asked Peter about a decision Peter would need to make, to keep following Him or to leave as the crowds did. Peter said eloquently, "Lord, where else can we go. Only you have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68).

- What will you choose?
- How often do you commit your decisions to God in prayer? (Phil 4:6-7)
- What will you base your life on? (Josh 24:15b)
- What God orientated decisions have filled you with joy? (Neh 8:10)

RECONCILING FALSE IMAGES OF GOD

"NEGATIVE IMAGES OF GOD AND HOW THEY IMPACT OUR DECISION-MAKING"

False



Authoritarian without Empathy

This image paints God as a distant figure who is only interested in accomplishing ministry objectives. Although God may speak to us at times or dispense calling, there isn't much care or consideration given to our circumstances or our dreams and desires.

If we hold onto this view, then we may feel God doesn't value our family, friends, or support structures in our lives. As a result, we may end up feeling angry or resentful towards God or carrying bitterness or mistrust in our hearts towards God.



A Stern Judge

Some of us hold to the image that God is a stern judge, waiting to announce His verdict on us. This creates a subconscious belief of needing good works for salvation and acceptance. This may play out in your decision-making process in the following ways:

- We only have one chance to get it right - so we may rush instead of entering into a time of discernment.
- Calling comes through a defining moment in time or experience, rather than a process developed in relationship. Without a two-way relationship, we may feel disempowered and make decisions blindly without taking the time to process our feelings or fears.
- In our desire to please God, we may cut off the voices of others that could bring perspective and help guide us to make wise choices.



Conditional Love

We may base our relationship with God on more of a transactional basis. Sometimes we unknowingly set conditions of the call. For example, "*If God does this for me, I will follow God's plan*". Or, "*If God calls me to this place, or provides me with this opportunity, then I'll go*". Or, we may hold onto the belief that we need to always please God in order to receive his love and acceptance.

If we hold onto this view, then our choices will be heavily influenced by the need to feel accepted, loved, and liked by God. If we fail to respond to God quickly, we may worry that we've disappointed Him or feel cut-off from Him in some way. In this case, we ultimately end up making decisions out of a place of fear rather than peace.



A few images of God to reflect on:

Creator (Gen 14:19), Father (Psa 89:26), Deliverer (Psa 40:17), A Parent (Hos 11:3-4), The Path of Life (Psa 16:11), Gardener (Jn 15:1), A Place of Refuge (Isa 4:6) Fortress (Psa 59:16), Mighty in battle (Psa 24:8), Holy (Lev 11:44), A Shield (Psa 18:2,30), Mother Bear (Hos 13:8), Comforter (2 Cor 1:3), A Woman in labor (Isa 42:14), A Midwife (Psa 22:9-10), A nursing Mother (Num 11:12-13, Isa 49:15), Master (Mal 1:6, Matt 23:8), A Mother Eagle (Deut32:10-12) Water (Isa 55:1, Jn 7:38-39), The Strength of my life (Psa 27:1), Faithful (Deut 7:9), Light (Psa 27:1, 1 Jn 1:5), Strong Tower (Prov 18:10), Love (1 Jn 4:8,16).



Scriptures

Compassion Psalm 23:6, Phil 3:15, Jn 3:16, Rom 5:7-11, Jer 29:11-13, Lk11:9-13, Gal 5:1, Jms 1:17

Graceful Judge Jn14:16-17, Rom 5:8-9, Heb 4:14-6, Jms 4:8.

Unconditional Love Ps 9:10, Rom 8:21, 1 Cor 13:11, Eph 1:3, 1 Jn 4:18.

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"HAVING A HEALTHY IMAGE OF GOD WILL RESULT IN MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS"

Accurate



Authority with Compassion

God is our supreme authority but God never removes our free will or sets out to harm us. We are not merely a resource that God uses to accomplish His plans. Scripture tells us that we are God's children, co-heirs and co-labourers with Christ.

God values us and the support structures He has brought into our lives. And if we find ourselves called to a new environment, God will grow what He has already established and continue to provide support and community for us to flourish. This will help us trust Him and ultimately guide our decision-making process.



The Graceful Judge

Scripture does tell us that God will judge every person. But Scripture also reveals that God is a graceful judge and sent Jesus to forgive our sins and be our saviour. God's default setting isn't one of condemnation, but one that seeks to draw all people into relationship with Him. God also knows that life is challenging and reveals Himself as our helper.

With this view in mind, we are empowered by a more accurate image of God, one that understands God is for us, and not against us. God has a heart full of love towards us and comes alongside us in a supportive manner. This image of God enables us to be more vulnerable with God in prayer, relying more on His grace and strength to make the right decision.



Unconditional Love

Jesus came to reveal God's heart and attitude towards us (Jn 1:18, 14:9). God's deepest desire is to be in a life-giving, loving relationship with us.

If we know that God accepts us, loves us, values us, cares for us, then we can make decisions out of a place of peace, security, and joy. Knowing this empowers us to try - and if we fail - to try again. If we feel we need more time to discern God's will, we won't feel rushed or pressured to make a hasty decision, because we trust God will still bless us.

Obedience and steps of faith are much easier when we operate from that state of internal peace. It is simply a natural response to the goodness of God.



Discerning a Call



Have you ever wondered, “What path does God want me to follow?” or “What plan does God have for me in this season?” and “How will I know what that is?” or “How do I discern if this is a God thing or not?”

The call to ministry can be fluid and hard to discern at times. For some, it comes as a reoccurring thought, a pulling of one’s heart in a specific direction or a growing sense of responsibility. Some have a more definitive experience and can pinpoint when and where they received a calling.

Many people, however, go through long periods of discerning, testing, trying, talking, and praying to get a stronger and clearer sense of where God may be leading them. Calling often clarifies over time. No one starts out knowing exactly what comes next. God’s what is often different from God’s when. Philippians 3:15 encourages us that as we step things out, God will lead us: *“And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you”*.

It’s comforting to know that God will direct us but it’s also important to remember just as it’s easier to steer a moving car, God generally waits for us to take a step of faith before we clearly understand where He is leading us. Some describe the beginning of their journey as:

- “I think/feel there is more I’m meant to be doing with my life.”
- “I know God is calling me to something different.”
- “I want to serve God.”

For some, the process doesn’t seem long or complicated at all. I’ve heard many leaders say, “the need is the call so let’s just get on with it”. It’s like the verse in Acts 15:28 *“It seemed right to us and to the Holy Spirit”*. Calling doesn’t always need to be complicated; it can be as simple as it just seems right.

BUT HOW DOES CALLING OCCUR?

Do we need a burning bush or something? Because calling is something God initiates, one thing we need to develop is a sense of how God communicates with us. In today’s world, there are many forms of communication: spoken, email, text, video conferencing, letters, phone, in-person, online meetings, sign language, or body language just to name a few.

When it comes to calling, God doesn’t just communicate it in one standard way. Calling may happen in a time of prayer, or when you’re reading the Bible, or through a spiritual experience. It may happen at the mercy seat or a sacred space, or it can happen naturally through a conversation.

Calling can occur in many different ways:

- You might have a clear sense that God is asking you to do something specific.
- You might have an experience specifically attributed to the Holy Spirit, like a dream, vision or prophetic word.
- Perhaps it is simply the most logical response you can think of based on your Biblical worldview – again, coming back to the Great Commandment and Great Commission.
- It may be a growing sense of purpose and passion.
- Or, maybe you've grown up in a culture where several of your family members are in ministry.
- It could be that other leaders around you recognise a gift and calling to ministry on your life and encourage you to pursue it.
- You may feel that the best way for you to express your dedication to God is to live out a specific covenanted lifestyle. For some, Officership is simply the best way to fulfil their calling.
- The church may play an active role in helping you discern a calling through opportunities presented to you.
- Or, maybe you will be out buying milk and bread - just going about your daily life - and something will cement in your heart and over time you will find yourself naturally outworking what you will later discern as your calling.

It's important to remember that calling is not an end in and of itself – it has a purpose, and that purpose is about ministering to others. God has a world that needs to experience the love and person of Jesus. John Ortberg, a pastor in America writes,

**“People with the strongest and healthiest sense of calling
are not obsessed with their calling.
They are preoccupied with the Caller”**

DISCERNING GOD'S TIMING

God's *what* is often different from God's *when*. Sometimes we gain the clarity of *what* God wants us to do but don't necessarily know *when* it's for.

- When it comes to the general calling (the Great Commandment and the Great Commission), it's always the right time to share the love of Jesus with others.
- When it comes to a specific call, perhaps a call to officership, sometimes things happen straight away, other times, it's a long process.

It's also important to remember that God's timing varies from person to person. There are many reasons for this. It could be for our development. It could be to grow our capacity. We may need to learn new skills.

As long as we cultivate open hearts – that is, we prayerfully seek God's leading and timing, with a willingness to respond – we won't miss out on what God has planned for us. Discerning God's call takes time and so it's also helpful to do the journey of discerning calling with others around you that can provide feedback, encouragement, and spiritual perspective.

SENSING A CALL TO SERVE GOD THROUGH THE SALVATION ARMY

Some leaders are specifically called to serve God fulltime through the mission and ministry distinctiveness of The Salvation Army. What is great about serving God through The Salvation Army is that it places you in an environment where you can be appointed to lead in different ministry contexts.

In The Salvation Army you have opportunity to:

- Lead churches,
- Help suffering humanity in practical ways,
- Share the love and hope of Jesus,
- Bring true, measurable and lasting change to communities,
- Be part of a global mission force,
- Enjoy an endless variety of ministry expressions,
- Represent one of Australia's most trusted names,
- Have ministry opportunities across the world,
- Grow as a leader,
- Express God's kingdom.

NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal orange lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.



The Challenge of Calling

It can be challenging at times to follow after the call of God. There are many obstacles and trials we will need to overcome along the way.

THE CHALLENGE OF ENDURING

Calling isn't a guarantee of success. It would be nice if it were, but just because we may be called to a specific ministry, location, task, or role, doesn't mean that:

- It will work out as we hoped, or
- We will reach the entirety of the vision, and everything we dreamed about will be accomplished, or that
- The ministry we're involved in will grow larger and larger.

Of course, God does amazing things – and we should prayerfully anticipate God's blessing as we pursue His call, but we also need to be prepared to embrace tough seasons.

Calling has often been referred to by leaders as an anchor. Knowing your calling will help you get through dark days and challenging times. Sometimes it's not about what we can accomplish through our calling, but what God is forging in us through our calling. God doesn't call us to be superheroes and save the day with "our great ministries and calling".

Instead, God calls us to be consistent, to turn up day after day and serve, day after day, year after year. It may not be glamorous. You may not feel recognised. You may not feel appreciated. And yes, you may want to give up at times, but our world desperately needs ministers who will love others and be a friend to the friendless.

It can be a real challenge to reconcile that one of the most powerful aspects of ministry is just to be there, consistently, for others. To overcome this challenge, we are encouraged to rely on Christ's strength,

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor 12:9).

THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE

There's also a lot of natural fears that will pop up from time to time:

- Will I earn enough money?
- Is the timing right?
- What will my family and friends think?
- Is this really for me?
- Did I hear God correctly?
- Will this be a good choice for my kids?
- Where will we live?
- What if I move to a place where I don't know anyone?

You may even find that people around you will try and talk you out of your calling; you might be the first Christian in your friendship group and the idea of ministry is new. You may face the obstacle of "It's not a normal career path".

All good things in life are worth fighting for – and calling is no different. It can be hard at times, but for every challenge we face, God will be there for us.

To overcome this challenge, we are encouraged to develop our trust in God,

"That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Tim 2:12).

THE CHALLENGE OF THE START

One of the other challenges we may need to overcome is a belief that unless we experience calling in a dramatic way, it is somehow not powerful enough, or genuine, or maybe it isn't even a calling at all? Many ministers have asked themselves the question, "God – did you really call me?"

Perhaps you've heard testimonies of God calling people very clearly; they had a dramatic sense of call or an experience with God that left them with no doubt. That is wonderful! We celebrate those stories. But without reflection, these stories may leave us misguided in thinking that's the only way calling occurs.

The encouraging news is, that God, for the majority of time and perhaps in His most frequent way, calls us during the normal routines of our everyday lives. Consider the following examples:

- Joshua began his journey in a tent (Exo 33:11),
- David was in the fields minding his father's sheep (1 Sam 16:11),
- Elisha was working his dad's farm with oxen (1 Kings 19:19),
- Peter was at work (Mk 1:16),
- Paul was out on another one of his religious crusades (Acts 9:1-3),
- Priscilla and Aquila were fleeing persecution (Acts 18:2).

All of these people were called, or stepped into their calling, during their normal, ordinary, daily routines. Yes, what happens next for each one of them is quite extraordinary but their starting point wasn't a burning bush, open eyed visions, or angles descending from on high. They simply responded to what God was doing in that moment, and calling unfolded as a result.

Another interesting note is that they all followed God's leading without knowing the end outcome or how it was exactly going to play out in their lives. It doesn't matter how or where or when a calling comes into our lives; what matters is that we follow after it.

**“For we are God’s handiwork, created in
Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do”
- Eph 2:10**

NAVIGATING CHALLENGING TIMES

So what are some ways we can push through these challenges and hold onto our calling? Here a few suggestions:

- Seek out perspective through coaching or mentoring.
- Share your journey with friends who will pray for you.
- Share your journey with leaders who can help you get the resources you need.
- Learn about resilience.
- Consider a pet e.g. a friendly dog who is always happy to see you can bring a lot of joy.
- Choose a sport or exercise regularly.
- Understand how your personality type deals with and expresses stress.
- Seek out pastoral care and guidance.
- Learn new skills to manage the demands of ministry.
- Practice your favourite spiritual disciplines.

REFLECTION EXERCISE

Consider the list above and circle a few of the suggestions you feel comfortable exploring.

NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal orange lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, resembling notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

A person is shown in profile, holding a vintage-style radio to their ear. The background is a warm, golden sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare effect. The person's hand and the radio are silhouetted against the bright light.

Hearing God's Voice

Music seems to be a universal language; in every culture, in every part of the world, music is played, sung, enjoyed, and released into the airwaves.

There are many different ways to listen to music: mobile phone, YouTube, Spotify, online streaming, CD players, vinyl records, on the T.V. But one of the most enduring ways to listen to music is the radio.

The radio is an amazing invention when you think about. There's all this music floating around us right now, the airwaves around us are filled with music, but the only way we can hear it is if we use a radio and tune in. The music is here for us all to listen to – but only those who tune in will be able to hear it.

It's a very similar concept when it comes to discerning God's voice. God is always speaking, His voice is literally filling the universe, the Bible says in Col 1:17,

“He is before all things and in him all things hold together...”

In Genesis 1:3 we read,

“And God said, “Let there be...”

Those very words, spoken in Genesis 1:3 continue today. Without the eternal spoken word of God, the very fabric of the world would cease to exist – God's voice is eternal, filling the universe and holding all things together. And if we tune in, if we pause, if we get quiet, if we lean in, we can hear God communicating to us, helping us, guiding us, leading us.

Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.” (Jn 16:12-12).

Jesus affirms that the Holy Spirit will speak to us. Jesus also said in the Gospel of John 10:3-4,

“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice”

So it's also the intention of Jesus to speak to us. These Scriptures spark a great invitation for us to learn how to tune in and follow the voice of Jesus.

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

God speaks in different ways, here are just a few common ways:

1 Nature: We can discern God speaking to us through nature.

- "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Rom 1:20).
- "God's splendour is a tale that is told, His testament is written in the stars. Through the marvels of the heavens. His truth is on tour in the starry-vault of the sky, Showing His skill in creation's craftsmanship. Each day echoes its secret to the next, Night with night sharing its revelation-knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-4 TPT).
- "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8).

I wonder if this is why God put Adam in a garden and not in a house? What about you, have you ever tried to hear God outside? Can I encourage you to go on a prayer walk this week? I've found that when I get outside I often sense God's presence and find it easier to pray and hear from God.

2 The Bible: We can discern God speaking to us through the Bible

- "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).
- "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21).

I find it a good practise to read the Bible with a pen and notepad close by. I often find that a Scripture will jump out to me and be relevant for what I'm going through.

3 The Church: We can discern God speaking to us through the community of the church:

- "It seemed good to *the Holy Spirit* and to *us*" (Acts 15:28).
- "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should *weigh carefully* what is said" (Cor 14:29).
- "The apostles and elders met to *consider* the question" (Acts 14:6).

The main theme we pick up in these Scriptures is that listening for God's voice is also a community activity. What we hear in private is outworked in public, so it's important we have godly people in our lives that can help discern what God may be saying. Oftentimes, God will use the church community to recognise and affirm the grace and calling on our lives.

WHY IS IT HARD TO HEAR FROM GOD?

God's voice often comes at the volume of a whisper. Have you ever found that? Have you ever wondered why that is? One of the possible answers to this is found in 1 Kings 19. Elijah had just called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel and is now spending time with God at Mt Horeb.

We read, "There was fire, a thunderous wind, and an earthquake, but after the fire came a gentle whisper...then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:11-13).

Perhaps one of the reasons God speaks softly to us is because He wants us to lean in – to get close to Him.

The thing about a whisper is.... the volume is low...and you have to lean in closer to hear it.

That's what God desires – for His children to be close to Him. When we are close to God, when we lean in, we hear His voice. God whispers to draw us close to himself.

For yourself, you may lean into God through prayer, reading your Bible, caring for others, being involved in outreach. Maybe you lean in by pausing in the midst of a busy day and just reflecting of God's goodness and kindness.

TUNING INTO GOD'S VOICE

If you look at a radio, one of the things you'll notice is that there are two frequencies to choose from: AM or FM. And you'll also notice that what is played on AM radio is different from FM. The frequency determines what you will hear.

When it comes to tuning into God's voice, the first thing we need to do is tune into the right frequency.

There's a great story in the Bible that highlights this principle. In John 10 we read,

**“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.
He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them,
and his sheep follow him because they know his voice” (Jn 10:3-10).**

A little bit of context will help here. In the fields of Israel, the nights are very cold and are very dangerous for sheep. There are all kinds of threats: jackals, hyenas, poisonous spiders, snakes, and robbers. All of which seek to kill, steal or destroy sheep.

To protect their flock at night, shepherds would corral their sheep into a makeshift sheepfold. These are commonly at the far end of a canyon where a low stone wall creates a natural enclosure that can fit a large number of sheep. The shepherd would lay at the entrance to stop the sheep wandering out and prevent anything harmful from sneaking in.

Now this is key: it was very common for lots of shepherds, with different flocks, to share the same sheepfold at night. You could have over 100 sheep, from 3-4 different flocks all mixed in with one another. So in the morning, the shepherds would go and stand on different parts of the field and call out their flock using a unique sound or phrase or tune. The flocks would naturally separate themselves out and go to their shepherd.

How do the sheep know which shepherd is theirs? How are they able to discern one shepherd's call from another? It's because they are tuned into the distinct tones and timbers of their shepherd's voice.

In the time of Jesus, there was a group of overly religious people called the Pharisees – they thought they knew God's voice better than anyone. They memorized the Jewish Scriptures word for word and practised everything it said to do. But for them, they thought God would reject them if they did the slightest thing wrong. And because of this, for them, the frequency of God's voice was strict, judgemental, conditional, and not very accepting.

But Jesus showed us that God's frequency is one of love and forgiveness. For Jesus, and for us, God's voice doesn't carry the harsh tones of judgement and rejection – it is full of life, love and hope. God doesn't speak to us to condemn us, to reject us, to make us feel unworthy. God's voice always draws us close to Him.

And that's God's frequency: God's speaks in the distinct tones of peace and love.

**"The voice of Jesus reverberates with
the tones and timbers of peace and love"**

REFLECTION EXERCISE

The topic of hearing from God can be difficult for many of us. We sometimes approach this topic like it's the most natural thing in the world that happens, but in reality, many of us struggle to hear God or would find it hard to say, "God spoke to me". So let's take some time to prayerful work through the following:

- Write down an example of when you felt God was leading you, or a time that you look back on and can see God was involved.
- What are some of the promises of God you are currently holding on to or believing for? In what ways do you see God give confirmation that He is answering your prayers?
- What is your favourite verse? Why? What might God be trying to say to you through this?
- How does God communicate with you?
- What are some other Scriptural examples of God speaking to people, and list the ways.

NOTES

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you are invited

Personal Response

RESPONSE AND INVITATION

Discerning God's call takes time. There are many things to consider, think about, and pray through. But please be encouraged, you are not on this journey alone.

We trust this workbook has been helpful for you. We also want to encourage you in your journey and what you're exploring. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task" (1 Tim 3:1). It is a wonderful privilege to be an ambassador for God and uphold the gospel message to others.

We are praying for you and welcome the opportunity to sit down with you and discuss any of the material in this guided reflection and have a friendly conversation about your calling or desire for ministry.

You can reach out to us at:

e) candidates@ebc.edu.au

f) facebook.com/TSAOfficershipRecruitment

For more resources and information, please visit:

w) www.salvationarmy.org.au/comealive

God bless.

**"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything
I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always,
to the very end of the age."
- Matt 28:19-20**

PRA YER RESPONSE

Lined area for writing a prayer response.

SCRIPTURE JOURNEY MAP

The Great Commandment

Deut 6: 5
Mic 6:8
Matt 22:37-9

The Great Commission

Matt 28:19-20
Mk 16:15-18

"WHOEVER ASPIRES TO BE AN
OVERSEER DESIRES A NOBLE
TASK" - 1TIM 3:1

Good, perfect, pleasing will ...
Rom 12:1-2

Gen 1:27, Gen 2:15, Jer 29:11, Matt 16:24,
Jn 10:10, 2 Cor 10:13, Eph 2:10, Heb 12:1.

God's **what** is
often **different**
from God's
when

Healthy Images of God
Authority with Compassion

Psalms 23:6, Phil 3:15, Jn 3:16, Rom 5:7-11, Jer 29:11-13, Lk 11:9-13, Gal 5:1, Jms 1:17.

The Graceful Judge

Jn 14:16-17, Rom 5:8-9, Heb 4:14-6, Jms 4:8.

A God of unconditional love

Ps 9:10, Rom 8:21, 1 Cor 13:11, Eph 1:3, 1 Jn 4:18.

Called ...

To Christ: Jn 1:4, Jn 14:6, Acts 2:21.

To Be: 1 Jn 3:1, 1 Peter 2:19.

To Do: Mic 6:8, Matt 5:13-16, Jam 2:14-17.

"God empowers us with choice. God never takes
away our free will, our ability to choose"

Healthy Images of God
Gen 14:19, Psa 89:26, Psa 40:17, Hos 11:3-4, Psa 16:11, Jn 15:1, Isa 4:6,
Psa 24:8, Lev 11:44, Psa 18:2,30, Hos 13:8, 2 Cor 1:3, Isa 42:14, Psa 22:9-10,
Num 11:12-13, Isa 49:15, Mal 1:6, Matt 23:8, Deut 32:10-12, Isa 55:1,
Jn 7:38-39, Psa 27:1, Deut 7:, Psa 27:1, 1 Jn 1:5, Prov 18:10, 1 Jn 4:8,16.

Discerning Phil 3:15, Prov 11:14, 15:22, Acts 15:28.

Choice Deut 30:19, Dan 3:16-18, Est 4:11-16, Lk 22:42, Mk 8:34-5

Voice Gen 1:3, Col 1:17, Jn 16:12-12, Jn 10:3-4, Rom 1:20, Psa 19:1-4,
2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:21, 1 Kings 19:11-13.

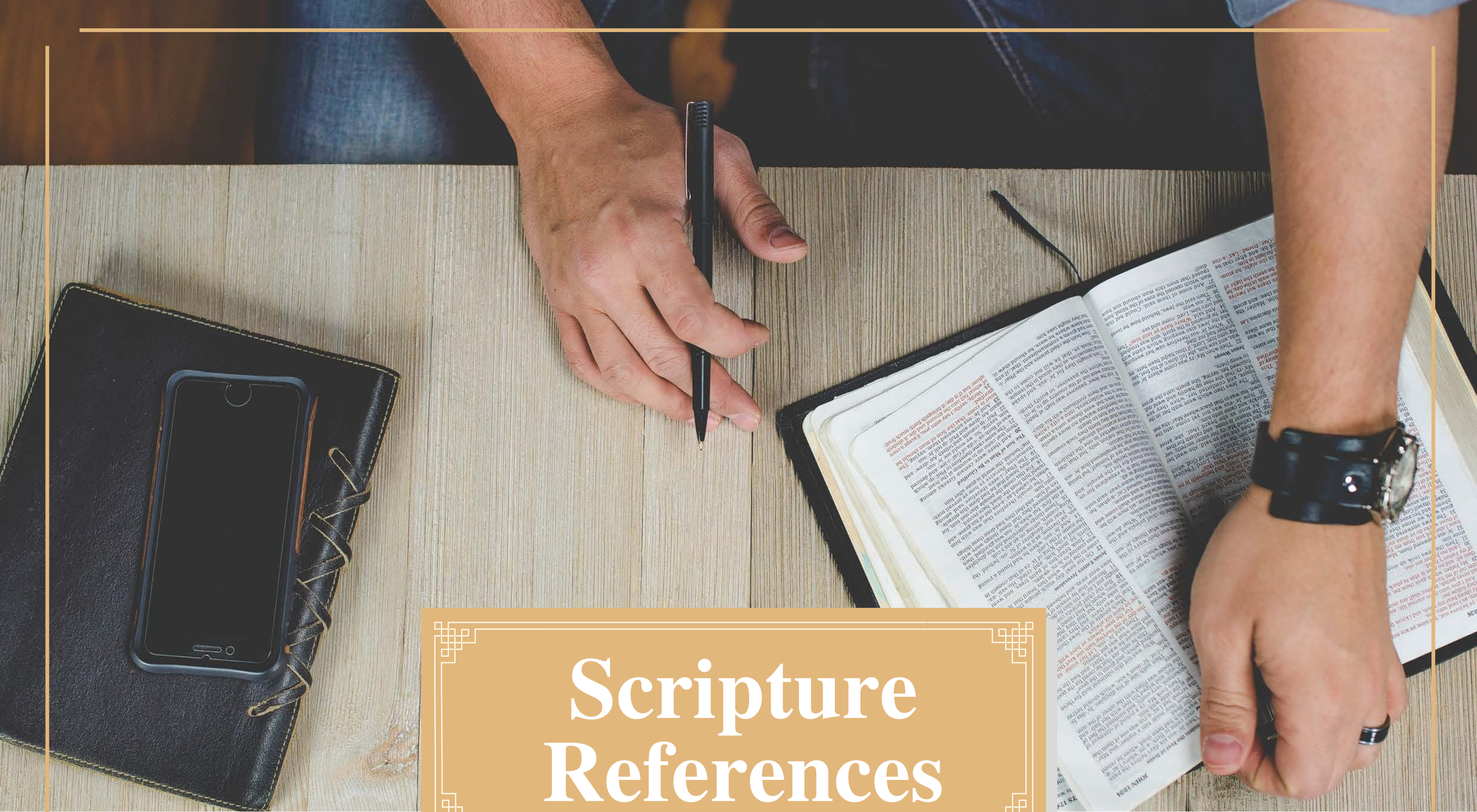
Gifts

Matt 25:15, 1 Cor 12:7-11, Rom 12:6-8, 1 Pet 4:10-11,
Gen 40:8, Dan 5:11, Exo 35:30-35, 36:1, 1 Chron 15:16,
Dan 1:3-5, Neh 13:1-31, Eph 4:11-12, Lk 3:4-6, Acts
18:26, Rom 16:1-4.

"People with the
strongest and
healthiest sense of
calling are not obsessed
with their calling. They
are preoccupied with
the Caller"
- J. Ortberg

"WE CANNOT HAVE A FIXED MINDSET,
CALLING IS NOT STATIC, IT'S ABOUT
BEING AVAILABLE
FOR GOD"

"Calling leads to formation and formation leads
to calling" - N.T.Wright



Scripture References

Listed below for your convenience, are several Scriptures that touch on the theme of calling and responding to God. We encourage you before you begin reading to ask the Holy Spirit to highlight one or two verses to you.

Prayerfully reflect on the verse, being guided by the Holy Spirit, and ask, "What might God be saying to me."

1 Sam 16:11

So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."

1 Kings 19:11-12

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:19

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

1 Chron 15:16

David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their fellow Levites as musicians to make a joyful sound with musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals.

Dan 1:3-6

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Psa 19:1-4 (TPT)

God's splendour is a tale that is told, His testament is written in the stars. Space itself speaks His story every day. Through the marvels of the heavens. His truth is on tour in the starry-vault of the sky, Showing His skill in creation's craftsmanship. Each day echoes its secret to the next, Night with night sharing its revelation-knowledge. Without a sound, without a word, without a voice being heard, Yet all the world can see its story, Everywhere its gospel Is clearly read so all may know.

Psa 37:4

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Matt 5:14

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Matt 5:13-15

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden".

Matt 9:9

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

Matt 22:37-9

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.... And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Matt 28:16-10

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mk 1:16-18

As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

John 16:13

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.

Acts 9:1-3

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was travelling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

Acts 13:2

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 13:47

For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Acts 13:47 (NLT)

For the Lord gave us this command when he said, "I have made you a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth."

Acts 15:28

It seemed right to us and to the Holy Spirit.

Rom 8:14

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

Rom 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Phil 3:15

And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

Eph 4:11-13

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Col 1:16-7

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

2 Tim 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

1 Peter 2:19

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.



Discerning God's call takes time. It's helpful to do the journey of discerning calling with others around you that provide feedback, encourage, and spiritual perspective. If you would like to speak to someone about calling, feel free to contact us: www.salvationarmy.org.au/comealive/contact-us

For more information regarding ministry visit

W www.salvationarmy.org.au/comealive

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