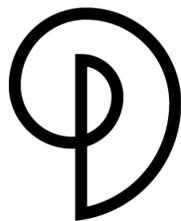


SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



**PRINCE
OF PEACE**
Called to Connect



Called by God in Many Ways

January 5 & 6, 2019

We want everyone to understand and believe in the biblical truth that all disciples are called, because believing that we are called gives depth and meaning to life. It helps us to see that our story is intricately and intentionally woven into God's larger story. The three core truths proclaimed in this week are: 1) all are called, 2) by God, 3) in various ways .

SCRIPTURE TEXT : 2 TIMOTHY 1:3-11

Read the scripture text together as a group.

BACKGROUND INFO

Paul writes this letter from prison, awaiting his execution. We can imagine that the long, lonely hours would have provided Paul ample opportunity to reflect on both the joys and sorrows of his life's work. Paul writes to encourage Timothy to remain faithful as a young leader, facing the challenges of false teachers. And to begin this letter of encouragement Paul reminds Timothy of where his journey as a young leader began – in the faith of his mother and grandmother. Out of that faithful foundation God called Timothy to be a leader in the early Church. Paul sees this call as a trust, something entrusted to Timothy by God and therefore it must be stewarded faithfully. But Paul also reminds us that we have all been called to live a holy life that bears witness to the grace of God in Christ, each one of us!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Remember a time you felt God at work in your life. What did you learn from that experience?
- Have you ever sensed God's calling your own life? If so, when? How did you know it was God's call?
- What has shaped your idea around what it means to be "called"?
- What does this text teach us about our calling?
- What difference would it make if you believe that something in your life is a response to God's call?
- Why do you think people resist the notion of God's call in their lives?

APPLICATION: This week, consider how God is calling you into holy living each day. How can you show God's love in your day-to-day activities?

*Additional Resource: The Stories We Live by Kathleen Cahalan**

**This sermon series is based on concepts from Cahalan's book. This week's sermon and study guide following along with Ch. 1.*

CALLED

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2 Timothy 1:3-11

Jeff Marian

Some years our family has had a tradition of doing a jigsaw puzzle during the Christmas holiday. The scattered pieces simply sit on a table and anyone is welcome to sit down for a bit and try to fit a few pieces together. When our boys were younger, we found that if their hands were engaged in something relatively mindless it made conversation with them easier.

Occasionally I've sat down and gotten philosophical about jigsaw puzzles (It's an occupational hazard). We are, each of us, like a single puzzle piece. We long to fit somewhere. We come to realize that our lives don't make much sense in isolation. We want our lives to fit into a larger picture, a picture that gives purpose and meaning to our lives and can help to make sense of our experience. Ever done a jigsaw puzzle only to find out that you're missing a piece? Ugh! The whole picture isn't quite complete unless every piece is fitted into place. And wouldn't we all like to believe that our lives are like that? That there is a place in which we fit, and that the picture of this world isn't quite complete unless we fill that space?

I believe that all those things are true for each of us. I believe that there is a larger picture into which we fit, a picture that can help make sense of our lives and our experience, a picture that connects us to something much larger than ourselves, a picture that isn't complete unless we're in it. That larger picture is God's work in the world, and every one of us is called into that work.

"Called." That's a freighted word. And a word that you might think doesn't apply to you, but you'd be wrong. For the next few weeks we're to explore what a "calling" is, where it comes from, how we discern our callings, and so much more. And it's our hope and prayer that through this worship series you'll discover just how you fit into the larger picture of God's work in the world in a way that creates a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in your life.

To get us started let's turn to Paul's second letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young leader to whom Paul wrote at least twice to mentor and encourage. Our scripture reading today is from 2 Timothy 1:3-11 [NLT]. As you listen, think of Timothy as a puzzle piece and how he fits in to the bigger picture of God's work in the world.

Imagine that you work for a major corporation. The phone on your desk rings. You pick it up and discover it's the company CEO on the other end. She says that she's putting together a team of people to launch a new initiative that's of vital importance to the company's future, and she wants you to serve on that team. Would you be honored? Would that heighten your sense of purpose and meaning? Of course it would!

Here's the truth I want you to wrap your heads and hearts around as we move through this series: The Creator and CEO of the Universe has called, is calling and will continue to call you into God's work in the world. And if you're like most people, you find that hard to believe based on several misconceptions. Maybe you'll recognize some of them.

Misconception One: Only pastors and priests get calls from God. Nope! Truth is, God calls everyone to be a part of God's work in the world. Everyone. Not just those who are called into religious vocations. Did you catch what Paul wrote to Timothy? He said, "For God saved us and called us to live a holy life." That "us" is us! God has called all of us to live a holy life. So, no matter where we are or what we're doing, when we seek to do it in a way that honors God, we're responding to God's calling in our lives. See how that works?

Misconception Two: God's call only refers to one's vocation or job. In other words, God's call in your life is all about what you want to be when you grow up. Nope! While that is certainly a calling, it's not the only calling we receive. God calls students long before they're ready for the work force, and God calls people long after they retire from the work force.

Misconception Three: You only receive one calling in life and you'd better not miss it because you don't get a second chance. Nope! Most of us experience multiple callings from God throughout our lives. And they're invitations, not mandates.

There is no single way in which God calls us, though we sometimes get hung up on certain expectations about how God calls. Have you been called through a burning bush like Moses? Have you been called by a voice and a blinding light like St. Paul? Probably not, which might lead you to think that you've never been called. But God calls us in all sorts of ways if we're paying attention to our experience. Sometimes God calls us through conversations with others. Sometimes God calls us through really difficult times that change the direction of our lives. Sometimes God calls us by helping us to understand what we love to do and what we don't love to do. God calls us in lots of different ways, but it might help to consider three experiences or metaphors for the ways in which God calls us.

Some people experience God's call as a **specific plan**. Sort of like an acorn. An acorn is destined to become one thing: an oak tree. Some people just have a very clear sense from early on in life exactly what they're called to do and to be in life. These are people who tend to believe that God has a clear plan for their lives, and they sense God leading and directing them to fulfill their destiny. I knew a man in Ohio who said that he knew from a very early age that God was calling him to be a doctor, and sure enough, he's a doctor today. And it gives him a deep sense of satisfaction to believe that he's doing exactly what God created him to do.

People who experience God's call this way may gravitate to verses like these:

For surely I know that plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. - Jeremiah 29:11

Or this one from Ephesians, *"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."* - Ephesians 2:10

People who experience God's call in this way enjoy a sense of certainty about the steps they take, though sometimes they struggle with anxiety when God's direction isn't clear in their lives.

Another way people experience God's call is as a **path**. In other words, they figure it out as they go along. While there have been a few times in my life when I've sensed a very clear calling from God, more often than not I've experienced God's call as a path, something I've just figured out as I go. For instance, I never experienced my calling to pastoral ministry as God's clear plan for me. In fact, when I was a senior in college I really wasn't sure whether I wanted to get my doctorate in psychology and be a therapist, or go to seminary and be a pastor. I wound up in seminary because a recruiter called me and offered me a scholarship to the Lutheran Seminary in Chicago. So, I went with the idea that I would go for one year and see if I liked it. And I did. And here I am. I think that this is one of God's callings in my life, but I didn't experience it as God's clear plan for me. It's something I discovered along the path of life.

One of the ways that people discern God's call on the path of life is as they come to know their gifts and passions. And that's what we see in St. Paul's encouraging words to Timothy. Paul wrote, "I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you." Timothy had the gift of deep faith, and that gift pointed Timothy toward his calling of leadership in the early Church.

Have you ever had someone point out to you something

you're really good at, maybe something you didn't even realize was a gift you had? Have you ever considered that God was calling you through that affirmation?

People who experience God's call as something that they discover along the way may gravitate to biblical characters like Abraham. God told Abraham to "go." Just go. He didn't tell him where. Abraham just went, and he discovered God's call along the way.

A third way that people sometimes experience God's call is through an **"aha!"** experience. It comes to them as a surprise, something totally unexpected. I knew a young woman who studied to be an accountant. She lost her job, and in desperation took a job as a nanny. Much to her surprise she discovered that she loved working with kids, much more than working with numbers. In time she went back to school and became a kindergarten teacher. God's call on her life was a complete surprise to her.

God's call on my life to be a cyclist was a complete surprise. I didn't even own a bike 10 years ago, but visiting with friends at a big cycling event one day stirred something inside of me. I was suddenly really excited about riding a bike. So much so that I bought a bike a few weeks later, and I've been pedaling ever since. And it's become one of the greatest joys of my life. What a surprise! You may not think that being a cyclist is a calling from God, but I do. It has led me to meaningful relationships. It's helped me to be a good steward of my body. It's become a way to raise awareness and money for pancreatic cancer research. I think that's God at work in my life.

You are not a stray puzzle piece in this world. You fit into the much larger picture of God's work in this world. And when you begin to see your life through the lens of God's calling, life takes on deeper purpose and meaning. And we live it differently. We live it with greater passion and intentionality because we're living it by faith in the Lord and for the Lord.

It's our hope and prayer that throughout this worship series you're going to see more clearly how your life is connected in God's work in the world, and that you'll become increasingly aware of the many, many ways in which God calls us. And at the end of this series you're going to have the opportunity to participate in a couple of different retreat experiences to get even more intentional about discerning God's call in your life.

But for now, let's move into a time of prayer. And as we pray, I'm going to invite you to do a quick scan through your life to see if you can identify a time or two when God called you. Maybe you knew it was God then, or maybe you're just beginning to see God at work in that way. And then we're going to thank God for the gift of each call that gives greater purpose and meaning to life and ask God to open our eyes and ears and heart to sense where God is calling you now.

CALLED

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2 Timothy 1:3-11



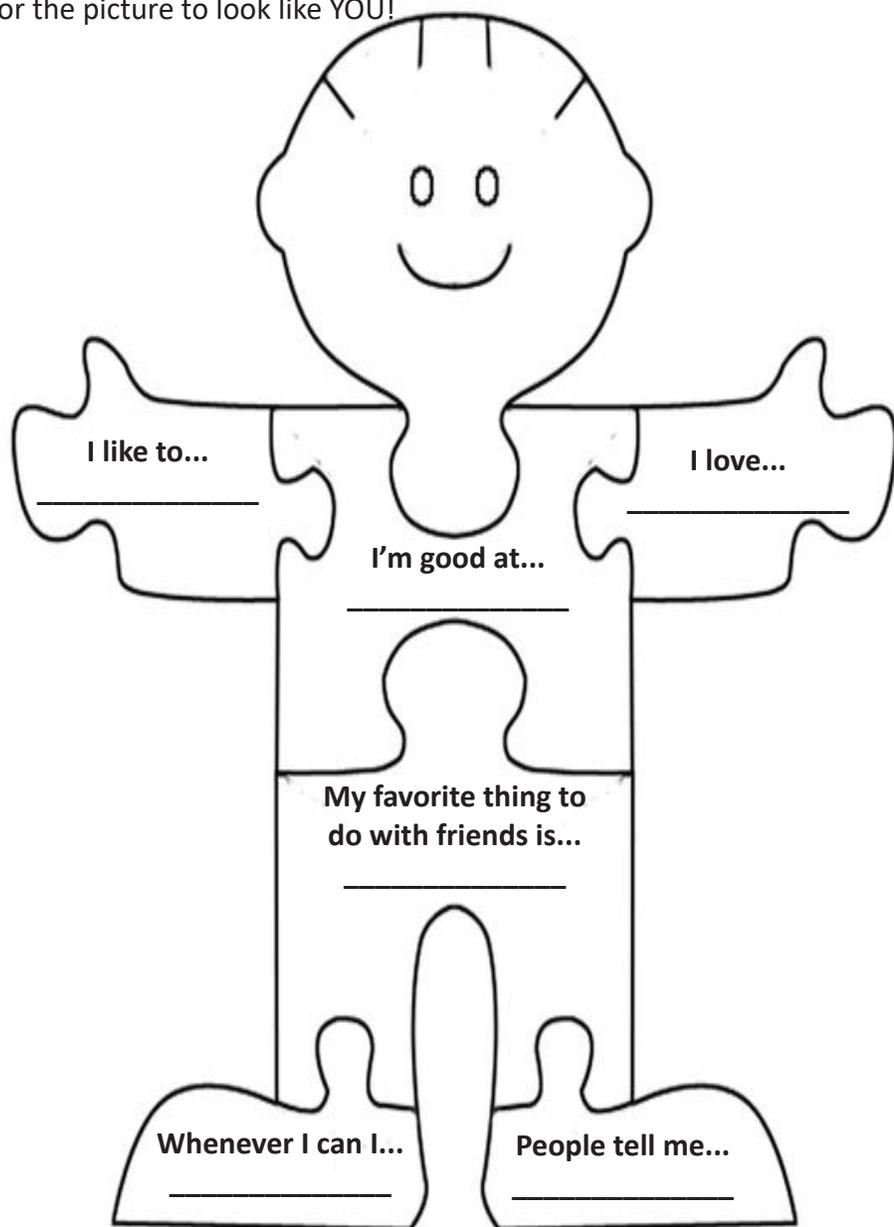
Today we'll be reminded that we are ALL called to live a holy life...we are ALL called to God's work...we are ALL called, in different ways, to live God's love in this world.

PUZZLE

You are not a stray puzzle piece in this world. You fit into the much larger picture of God's work in this world. You have a purpose. A calling.

God uses the things you're good at...the things you love to do...the ideas you have...God uses all of it to do God's work in this world.

On each puzzle piece, write ideas on how God might use you in this world. Color the picture to look like YOU!



FOR THE RIDE HOME

PRESCHOOL

“Calling” is a big concept. But as parents we have the chance to speak it into our kids’ lives every day. We can reinforce what we see as their strengths, those things that come naturally. We can expose them to many different experiences and see what “sticks” in terms of passions. We can include them on our journey as a way to model following God’s lead. Each day this week, join hands and pray the prayer listed below, asking that God would open your eyes to see how God might use you all in this world.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Did you know that you have a purpose, a calling, in this world? God is just waiting to use you... your gifts—the things you’re good at; your passions—the things you love—to do God’s work! And that’s true for EVERYONE! Cool, huh?!? This week, join hands and pray with your family that God would open your eyes to see how God might use you all in this world.

PRAY TOGETHER...

Gracious God, help us to see how you call each of us to your work in this world. Open our eyes to see how you have created us, uniquely and wonderfully, to be part of your bigger picture. Help us to be open to answering your call. In Jesus’ name. Amen.