

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



**PRINCE
OF PEACE**
Called to Connect



Called through Each Other

February 9 & 10, 2019

While God can call people like Moses through a burning bush, most people say that they first experienced a sense of calling through another person. God speaks through others to help us to understand who we are, where our gifts lie, and how they might be deployed for the sake of God's world. On the flip side, this truth encourages us to reflect back people's gifts to them. That's especially true for parents and grandparents. As a community of faith we are privileged and empowered to bless children with the affirmation of their gifts.

SCRIPTURE TEXT : PROVERBS 22:6

Read the scripture text together as a group.

BACKGROUND INFO

This is one way in which we first discern our callings in life. Someone else (in most cases our parents) see in us what we cannot yet see, name it and encourage its growth. And I would suggest that this process doesn't stop with our parents. For many of us, the pathway of our life, the discernment of our callings, has come from the insight and encouragement of family members, teachers, friends, and others, seeing in us what have not yet seen in ourselves. This truth, then, calls us to do two things. First, to be open to the insight and encouragement of others, to be willing to hear God's calling through others. Second, to allow the Spirit to use us to be a source of insight and encouragement in the lives of others, allowing God to call others through us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who discerned and encouraged your "bent"? How did they do it? What was the impact?
- Have you had the opportunity to help encourage someone's gift? What was that like for you?
- What barriers keep us from discerning and encouraging the gifts of others at Prince of Peace and beyond?
- What barriers stand in the way of our receiving and responding to the discernment and encouragement of others?

APPLICATION: This week, identify someone you can encourage. How are they gifted and what can you do to cheer them on? **BONUS:** Identify someone that encouraged your gifts and reach out to thank them.

*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. 6.*

CALLED

Called Through Each Other Proverbs 22:6

Jeff Marian

A few weeks ago I spent an hour with the pastor in charge of Lutheran Campus Ministry at the U of M. Pastor Kate is a brilliant young woman who loves working with students at this critical time in their life. We talked about the joys and the challenges of doing ministry on a college campus, and at one point I asked her what spiritual struggles college students are wrestling with these days. She said that one of the greatest struggles she deals with year after year is students trying to discern their calling, and in this case by calling she was talking about their career. She said, “So many students agonize over how to best invest their lives. It feels like a monumental decision that they have to make, but many of them lack the life-experience and self-awareness to sense where God might be calling them to invest their lives.”

I asked her how she helps them along the way and she said something profound. She said, “We talk about what brings them joy, but I also try to reflect back to them the unique gifts and talents that I see in them. Sometimes they’re shocked by what they hear. They’re unaware of some of their own gifts, but I believe that those gifts are often road signs pointing them to their future.”

Pastor Kate understands an important biblical truth that we’re going to explore this morning, and it’s this: *Our unique gifts, talents and experiences can often guide us in discerning God’s callings in our lives, and often God uses others to show us the way.*

We’ll find that truth hidden in our scripture reading today, a single verse from Proverbs 22:6. Let’s read it aloud together: *Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.* (ASV).

On the surface it’s easy to misunderstand this verse. On the surface it seems to say that if you teach your child right from wrong and discipline them well, they’ll likely follow that pathway throughout their lives.

And while there may be some truth to that, the real meaning of this little verse is hidden in the ancient Hebrew. A more literal translation would be this, “*Train up a child in keeping with his individual bent, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*” Individual bent. That’s an interesting phrase. What it’s saying is that, while our lived experiences certainly impact us, we all come out of the womb uniquely shaped. We each have a unique temperament, unique passions and unique gifts and skills that are baked into our being from birth. And that unique “bent” or shape of our lives often helps point us in the direction of God’s callings in our life.

For instance, from a young age we noticed that our middle son, Jacob, had high levels of empathy. He feels the pain of others keenly. And we also noticed that Jacob was always cool in a crisis. While others were running around with their hair on fire, Jacob just kept his cool. He seems to have been bent that way from the womb. Today, Jacob is a very successful paramedic at North Memorial Hospital.

We are all uniquely shaped, both from the womb and by our life experiences, and sometimes it takes someone else to notice those gifts and make us aware of them. Has anyone ever done that for you? Has anyone ever taken the time to reflect back to you some gift or talent that you didn’t even recognize in yourself? And then you found yourself building on that gift or skill? I have, and I’m grateful for each one.

My mother noticed at an early age that I had an imagination and a gift for telling stories. I have vivid memories of lying in the hammock with her on summer afternoons creating stories with her. She would start by speaking a line. And then I would add a line, and then she would follow. Together we created stories. It was her way of helping to nurture a gift that she saw in me.

I recall my high school English teacher calling our house one weeknight and reading to my parents a composition I had written. He ended the call saying, “This composition was so good I thought you needed to hear it.” That simple phone call awoke in me a passion for writing, a passion that served me well through school and into ministry. But it took someone else to make me aware of it.

Our unique gifts, talents and experiences can often guide us in discerning God’s callings in our lives, and

often God uses others to show us the way. And that isn't just true for children, or just for college students seeking to discern their vocation. It's true for all of us, at every age and stage of life. And that has implications for how we live. Let me suggest two.

First, if God calls us through others as they reflect back to us our gifts, then we ought to pay attention. When someone compliments you, don't shrug it off. Don't downplay it. You know how this goes. You go to someone's home for dinner and it's the most amazing meal you've ever eaten in your life, and when you compliment the chef she responds, "Oh, no, not really. Just something I threw together. Hardly better than Burger King really." Right? Almost all of us do this rather than really listening. And I wonder how often in our false humility we've missed hearing God's call through the voice of another who is reflecting our gifts back to us. So, the next time someone compliments you, rather than merely shrug it off simply say "thank you" and reflect on what you've just heard. Is God pointing you in a direction you should follow?

That's the first implication. Here's the second – let's pay attention to the giftedness of those around us and reflect it back to them. I think about how Jesus did this with Peter early on in their relationship. Jesus saw the gifts of leadership in Peter and reflected it back to him by giving him a new nickname, "The Rock", which is what the name Peter means. It took a while for Peter to live into his gifts, but Peter eventually become a foundational leader in the early Church. By calling out Peter's gifts, Jesus helped Peter to discern his calling.

Can you imagine what this church community would be like if we all committed to being more mindful and present in our relationships here with one another, so much so that we noticed each other's gifts? And imagine if we made the time to reflect those gifts back to one another. Imagine how that would serve to build one another up and encourage one another to invest those gifts into God's work in the world. And imagine if we dared to believe that in doing so God would be using us to help one another discern God's calling in our life, no matter what stage of life we're in. I believe that's exactly what God intends for us in the Body of Christ.

And here's one specific way in which we can think about doing that. Every time we celebrate a baptism here at Prince of Peace the liturgy ends with these words,

"Today, God has called, cleansed and commissioned these newly baptized for a higher calling and a deeper walk with Jesus Christ. And you the Prince of Peace community, will you welcome, support and grow in faith with them? If so, say "We will."

And we all say, "We will"! What if one of the ways in which we lived out that commitment was to get to know a few of the kids in our church well enough to speak into their lives and reflect back to them their gifts? We have hundreds and hundreds of kids active in our Family Ministry programs on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. Every one of them would benefit from having an adult just like you who cared enough about them to get to know them and speak into their lives. Contact someone on our Family Ministry staff if you'd like to know more.

So just imagine that in 10 years I'm having another conversation with the pastor in charge of campus ministry at the U of M. And when I ask about the spiritual challenges that students are facing, she tells me that students are really wrestling to discern their calling life. But then she adds, "Except for the students who come from Prince of Peace. So many adults have faithfully spoken into their lives and reflected back to them their gifts that they have a pretty good sense of where God is calling them in life." That is a vision worth living into.

[As a closing, we had the first name of every child and student involved in Family Ministry at Prince of Peace on slips of paper. We invited people to come and take one and commit to praying for that student and for the discernment of their gifts and calling in life.]

CALLED

Called Through Each Other
Proverbs 22:6



Today we'll be encouraged to tell others about the gifts we see in them so that they can begin to see how God might be calling them as well as to hear the truth others are speaking into our lives.

CALLED TO SPEAK INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Train Up a child in the way
he should go,
and even when he is old he
will not depart from it.

—Proverbs 22:6, ASV

CALLED THROUGH EACH OTHER

We are all called. And our calling can have a huge impact on each other. God works through us when we let others know the gifts we see in them! Find the words that remind us of what we can do for others in the puzzle below...

ENCOURAGE NOTICE		SUPPORT INSPIRE		SPEAK TRUTH		STIR MOTIVATE			
E	Z	N	R	I	T	S	T	Z	T
C	G	G	O	T	O	R	Z	T	E
I	G	A	R	T	O	K	D	S	T
P	P	U	R	P	I	Z	P	P	A
W	T	B	P	U	B	C	K	E	V
H	L	U	P	C	O	P	E	A	I
H	S	Y	N	B	V	C	S	K	T
I	N	S	P	I	R	E	N	C	O
Y	S	Y	F	H	S	X	R	E	M
H	B	R	Y	C	J	Y	D	T	S

FOR THE RIDE HOME

PRESCHOOL

As parents we have the awesome opportunity to speak into our kids' lives. This week, our focus is on how God works through others to help us see our calling and how we can do the same for them. When the people in our lives tell us what they see in us, we often discover things we didn't even realize. When we speak into the lives of others, God's calling in their life can become more clear. This week, focus on the strengths you see in your kids...and tell them! Help them to see the gifts they've been given and start thinking about how God might use them in this world.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

When people tell us about the things they notice we're good at, it can make God's calling in our life more clear. We can do the same for others! This week, freely receive the compliments you are given and start thinking about how God might use those things in the world. Also, take time to notice the gifts of the people around you...and tell them! God can work through you to impact their lives!

PRAY TOGETHER...

Gracious God, open our eyes to the gifts of others and give us the courage to share what we see. Help us to see the gifts in ourselves, too. Amen.