



All Called

Instruments of Calling Facilitator Guide

By Jim Merhaut

Part One – Calling

1. Welcome & Registration
2. Introduction & Opening Prayer (15 minutes)
3. What is Calling? (45 minutes)
4. The Eight Windows of Calling (75 minutes)
5. AllCalled.org Walkthrough (15 minutes)

Part Two – Becoming Instruments of Calling

6. The Big Picture and the Part you Play (15 minutes)
7. Moving Beyond the Awkwardness of Meaningful Conversations (15 minutes)
8. The Structure of a Calling Conversation (30 minutes)
 - a. How to start a calling conversation
 - b. How to sustain a calling conversation
 - c. How to transition to an invitation to action
 - d. How to close a calling conversation
9. Practicing (75 minutes)
10. Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Facilitator Background

Facilitator Preparation and Program Delivery Options

Prior to facilitating this training program, there are a few things to do and some options to consider. First, be sure to thoroughly read through the following documents to familiarize yourself with the big picture of this program:

- *Instruments of Calling Facilitator's Guide*
- "Facilitator Background" (at the end of the *Facilitator's Guide*)
- *Instruments of Calling Journal*

You will also want to take ample time to familiarize yourself with the AllCalled.org website. You will be introducing this website to the participants, and you will also learn much about calling on the website. Increasing your own understanding of calling will significantly enhance your ability to lead this training program.

The *Instruments of Calling* program is set up in two parts, but there is flexibility in how you deliver the two parts.

- **Option 1.** Offer two gathered programs scheduled for three hours each. You might offer them on consecutive Saturday mornings or consecutive weekday evenings.
- **Option 2.** Offer an overnight retreat doing Part 1 in the evening and Part 2 the following morning.
- **Option 3.** Offer a full-day retreat from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm.
- **Option 4.** Offer an online training using video conferencing software, such as Zoom, that has classroom features for the practice sessions and other breakouts.

Supply List

- Instruments of Calling Journal* (one per participant)
- Nametags
- Markers at registration table
- Sign-in sheets designed to collect contact information
- Newsprint and markers or a smart board
- Writing utensils for each participant
- LCD projector
- Screen
- Computer speakers
- Make eight signs with large print of the eight windows into calling conversations. Display them in the main gathering room. The signs will have a stronger impact if you can design a visual image for each sign.
- A room set up for quiet reflection and journaling

Part One. Calling

Welcome & Registration

Be prepared to cover the following bullet points to greet and orient the participants.

- Warmly welcome participants and sign them in as they arrive.
- If you don't already have their contact information, collect it now.
 - Full Name
 - Home Address
 - Cell Phone Number
 - Email Address
 - Preferred method of communication
- Distribute name tags and direct participants to refreshments and the seating area for the program.

Introduction & Opening Prayer (15 Minutes)

Introduction

After everyone has arrived or at the scheduled time of your gathering, use these or similar words to introduce the program:

Welcome to the Instruments of Calling training program that is designed around three goals:

- 1. To prepare you to identify callings in yourself and in others*
- 2. To prepare you to identify when people may be open to discussing a calling experience they are having*
- 3. To empower you to initiate, sustain, and close calling conversations with people who are not affiliated with a church but are open to growing in their relationship with God*

This program is called Instruments of Calling because that's what you can easily become. You can be an instrument of calling when you notice someone who is experiencing a calling from God, but they don't quite hear the calling clearly. You can be the instrument that helps to amplify the call for them. The funny thing about this kind of instrument is that it is mostly quiet. You amplify the call of another by mostly listening.

The people we are focusing on are not currently affiliated with or involved with a church but are interested in growing in their relationship with God. They might be family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers or others. You may be shocked to learn that the outcome we are shooting for is not to get them to join our church, although that may happen if that is where God is leading them; rather, we want to help them notice that something important is happening to them and there are lots of resources out there that can help them take the next steps on their spiritual journey. We humbly acknowledge that our church may or may not be a part of the journey God is calling them to. Our job is to help them discover God at the center of their call experience, and then trust that God will guide them to a faith community that best fits their spiritual needs at this moment in their life.

Inform the participants that the goals are in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*, and they can follow along in the packet throughout the program while also using it for notetaking.

Prayer

Opening Prayer

Begin the prayer with these or similar words:

We have been called to be here today for learning, and those who will be blessed by our work here will be blessed because each of you have responded to the call. Let us begin in a spirit of gratitude to God for calling us and for empowering us to say yes to becoming instruments of calling.

Opening Song

Sing a song from your worship tradition that has a calling theme.

Scripture: Romans 8:22-28

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Reflection

Invite participants to arrange themselves in groups of three to discuss the reflection questions after the reading in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*.

Reflection Questions for Reading:

- *What do you think this reading is teaching us about desire, need, and hope?*
- *What do you think this reading is teaching us about God's activity in the world?*
- *What do you think this reading is teaching us about calling?*

Close the discussion after about 5 minutes with these or similar words:

Let us pray: Thanks be to God that all of our needs and desires are generously responded to by our loving God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let us pray that we will always have open hearts to God's call and God's response to our calling. Let us also pray that we will open our ears to the callings of others so that the Spirit can work through us and the deepest hopes of humanity will be fulfilled. We offer our prayer in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

What is Calling? (45 Minutes)

Calling in My Life

Invite participants to journal on the prompt below. Reinforce the instruction to only journal on one of the four situations, not all four. There are further instructions in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*.

Describe a time when you did any one of the following four things:

1. *I helped a person who was suffering in some way.*
2. *I made an important shift in my career.*
3. *I lost someone or something important to me.*
4. *I worked on a relationship and it got better.*

After participants have had a few minutes to write, divide the participants into groups of three. If needed, you can create a group of four.

Invite participants to briefly share the details of their story. Each person will only have 20-30 seconds to share. Remind them that they are only sharing details, not meaning, so the sharing will be brief.

After the participants have shared, invite them to return to the journaling on the second prompt:

- *How do you think God was calling you in and through this experience?*

Give participants at least 5-10 minutes to reflect and journal on this question. Then invite them to return to their groups of three and share their calling reflections. As each person shares, invite the other two listeners to comment on how they see God calling in the story. The listeners may see God calling in ways that the storyteller might have missed. Allow about 15-20 minutes for this sharing.

Defining Calling

When the discussion is winding down, invite the participants to view Video 1.

Play Video 1

On a piece of newsprint or a smart board, write the following words on the top with ample space below for bullet points: *"Calling is..."*

Use these or similar words to introduce this activity:

We are all called, and each of us experiences God's call to loving responses every day. We shared some of those experiences just now. After having some time to share one of your calling stories and listening to two other calling stories, and after having viewed the video, how would you respond to what I just wrote on the board (newsprint)?

As participants share pieces of the definition of calling, record their responses in bullet form for all to see. Affirm their ideas and comment on them if appropriate. Your comments may include your own

ideas based upon your reading of the “*What Do we Mean by Calling?*” portion of the Facilitator Background document (at the end of this *Guide*).

Invite each participant to write their own definition of calling in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*. Allow time for each participant to share their definitions with the whole group.

The Eight Windows of Calling (75 minutes)

Introduction

Introduce video two with these or similar words:

Now that we have our own working definitions of calling, this second video will help us explore how calling has many expressions in daily life.

Play Video 2

After the video, introduce the following reflection activity with these or similar words:

*We’ve set up a quiet retreat space for you to read, reflect, and journal about each of the eight windows. The *Instruments of Calling Journal* has descriptions of each of the eight windows followed by reflection questions. You have 45-50 minutes of quiet time to do your own reflection on the eight windows.*

After the reflection time is over, gather the group back in the main learning space. Invite them to share their thoughts and questions about the reflection time on the eight windows.

After the discussion, close this part of the program with these or similar words:

As you can see, these eight windows are rich with meaning. God moves mysteriously in all of them, and we have so many opportunities to learn and grow and deepen our experience of love as we follow God’s call in these various life experiences.

I invite you to take time to visit the following website: www.allcalled.org.

You will find eight videos that are designed for people who are not affiliated with a church. Each video captures the essence of one of the eight windows. These videos could be a simple way for people you know to begin their own explorations of how God is calling them through one of the eight windows. Become familiar with these videos and the accompanying materials on the website; they are yet another way for you to become conversant on the eight windows.

AllCalled.org Walkthrough (15 minutes)

Take some time to display the AllCalled.org website on your screen. Walk the participants through the features of the website to help them become familiar with it and comfortable with how to use it for their own enrichment and as a resource that they will be referencing in their calling conversations.

Part Two. Becoming Instruments of Calling

The Big Picture and the Part You Play (15 minutes)

Use these or similar words to introduce the next video:

Before we learn the specific ways that you can engage others in calling conversations, we'd like to give you a bird's eye view of what the whole calling process might look like for an unaffiliated or uninvolved person who hungers to explore a calling.

Play Video 3

Give participants an opportunity to discuss what they learned about in the video. Some conversations about this process bring up the similarities with marketing techniques or even cult tactics. If these come up, it is important to highlight the freedom and loving care that rest at the core of this process. You do not find freedom and loving care at the core of most marketing and cult strategies and tactics. If this topic does not come up, it is still important for you to express the following in your own words:

Freedom and loving care make this process authentically Christian. Instruments of calling never resort to force, coercion, or tactics that compromise the well-being of those who are being called. The one being called is the one who decides whether or not to enter the process, what to do in the process, whether or not to stay in the process, and the speed at which they move through the process. To be a true instrument of calling, the well-being of the other must be your top concern.

Moving Beyond the Awkwardness of Meaningful Conversations (15 minutes)

Use these or similar word to introduce this portion of the program. Pause for a few seconds after you read each bullet point to let participants ponder the scene.

Now let's get into the nuts and bolts of what it means to be an instrument of calling. It is so common and so easy to miss opportunities to say meaningful things to people. Consider these examples:

- *A spouse does something well or something kind, and the other spouse notices but doesn't comment on it.*
- *A young man is at a family gathering and sees that one of his relatives seems distracted, and he chooses to find another less-challenging conversation to participate in.*
- *A clerk at a store is particularly helpful. The thought enters the customer's mind to tell the manager about the good experience, but the note never gets written.*
- *A teenager is learning how to drive a car, and the parent's comments focus primarily on what the child is doing wrong rather than highlighting what the child is doing right.*
- *A neighbor across the street who recently divorced waves from his yard. The other neighbor feels a nudge to start a conversation but decides not to.*

Invite participants to reflect and respond in the large group to the following question:

What do you think prevents us from saying something meaningful in these kinds of situations?

Invite participants to reflect and respond in the large group to the following question:

What are the possible good things that could happen if meaningful conversations happened in these situations?

Close this discussion with these or similar words:

The first step to having meaningful calling conversations is to move beyond the awkwardness, which may be caused by any number of things, and keep your attention focused on the good possibilities that can result from your effort to simply begin the conversation. When we don't take advantage of these opportunities, we're like musical instruments that never make a sound. When we play our part, the harmony we create with another person's calling enriches us both.

The Structure of a Calling Conversation (30-minutes)

How to Start a Calling Conversation

Use these or similar words to introduce this topic:

We have so many opportunities to participate in meaningful conversation with people we know, but, as we discovered earlier, we let the opportunities slip by. In this program, we are encouraging and equipping you to capture more of those moments and create opportunities for God's love to guide a person in need.

Use the eight windows of calling to notice when someone is giving you an opportunity to become an instrument of calling. When any aspect of one of the eight calling windows comes up in a conversation and you sense the person you are speaking with could use some guidance, then you have found a moment to say something, to play your part in God's song.

The main thing to do is to switch to curiosity mode and to avoid getting into I-have-all-the-answers mode.

Maybe you'll say something like, "I'm not intending to pry, but..."

- *"Tell me more about that."*
- *"That sounds big. What's going on?"*
- *"What do you think that means?"*
- *"What is that saying to you?"*

If prying is not an issue in this relationship, just skip that phrase and go right to the most appropriate bulleted phrase. Use your own words; the point is to get the person talking more about what they've brought up.

Give participants an opportunity to respond to the prompts suggested here for beginning a calling conversation. Invite them to imagine additional phrases they might use to get the conversation started.

How to Sustain a Calling Conversation

Use these or similar words to introduce this part of the program:

*Once you've gotten the conversation started, where do you take it? You take it where the other person wants it to go, and you do this by fostering in yourself a certain kind of presence in the conversation. You become present in a way that keeps you out of the way of God's calling that the person is experiencing. We can call this **detached presence** because you, the listener, choose to become momentarily detached from your own concerns and opinions so that you can be fully present to honor the concerns of the other person.*

Draw the following chart on newsprint for all to see:

What is it like for me when someone doesn't listen well?	What is the other doing that shows me they are not listening well?
What is it like for me when someone really listens to me?	What is the other doing that shows me they are really listening?

Fill in the boxes below the questions with the brainstorming responses of the participants. Feel free to add your responses to keep the ideas flowing if there is a lull. Encourage participants to take notes in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*.

Continue with these or similar words after the brainstorming:

Detached presence is a way to listen with empathy. The goal is to give the other person the experience of being truly heard. Here are some characteristics of detached presence:

- *I don't tell the person what to do.*
- *I don't tell the person how to think.*
- *I don't judge the person no matter what I hear.*
- *I trust that the person is in God's hands and on a sacred journey.*
- *I trust that if I listen authentically, God will do the work of guiding and directing.*
- *I am curious and ask open questions.*
- *I make observations about what I'm noticing and verify for accuracy.*

Detached presence is like being a supporting instrumentalist for an improvising soloist.

Engage the participants in a discussion about detached presence and listening with full attention. Offer some thoughts from the Facilitator Background document on the risks of giving advice and the proper situations in which one might offer advice.

Asking powerful questions and follow-up questions is also a great way to sustain a calling conversation. Inform the participants that good questions will assist the person by helping them go deeper into the topic they're sharing about. Good questions also signal that you are focused, interested, and listening closely. Direct the participants to the sample questions in the *Instruments of Calling Journal* and invite them to notice that they are open questions, meaning you can't answer yes or no to them.

Divide the participants into small groups of three or four and challenge them to imagine some responses to these questions and then to come up with some possible open follow-up questions based on the responses they imagine.

Continue with these or similar words:

In addition to asking open questions, you can also sustain a calling conversation by offering feedback to a person with observation statements. Observation statements have two key parts:

- 1. You express what you are noticing.*
- 2. You ask for verification.*

After you've finished those two key parts, you simply return to asking open questions.

For example, if someone is talking about trying to connect with an adult child by giving advice and the connection is just not happening, you might say something like, "It sounds like the more advice you give, the more your son resists. Do I have that right?" If the person verifies that you have understood correctly, then you could follow with a question like, "What do you think that means?" If the person says you haven't understood, then you simply ask for more information to help you understand.

Invite the participants to ask question or offer comments about observation statements.

How to Transition to an Invitation to Action

Use these or similar words to continue the program:

Your detached presence, your genuine curiosity, and your observation statements should encourage the person to talk a good bit about whatever it is they are experiencing. If you are confident that this person is open to learning more about how their experience might be enhanced by exploring how God is calling through the experience, then you can invite the person to visit the AllCalled.org website. Here's what you might say:

"I understand that you're not a churchy person, so I have some information about some really good free resources that might help you, and you don't have to connect with a church to access them. Would you be interested in checking out the website where you can find these resources?"

Invite the participants to write the transition script above using their own words. Then invite the group to share what they have written.

How to Close a Calling Conversation

Use these or similar words to continue:

To close the conversations, there are two things that are important for you to do:

- 1. Affirm their discernment by saying something like, "I can see that this really matters to you, and I think that's great! I enjoyed this conversation and hope you find some answers soon."*
- 2. Keep the door open by saying something like, "If you'd like to talk more, you know where to find me, but these resources might end up guiding you to someone or some group that could help you even better than I can."*

Encourage the participants to write in their own words how they would affirm the person and offer to keep the door open. Then invite the group to share what they have written.

Practicing (75 minutes)

Introduction

Transition to Video 4 with these or similar words:

Now it's time to prepare for practice. The following video will clarify the calling conversation process and set us up to practice our role as instruments of calling.

Play Video 4

After the video, field any comments or questions before you invite the participants to practice the process with each other. After the discussion, divide the participants into groups of three. Review the details of the calling window *Finding Meaning in Work*.

Clarify the following process:

- Two in the group will play the parts of the talker and the listener.
- The third person will time the conversation and then offer observations about what happened after the conversation is over.
- Refer the participants to the guide in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*.
- Each pair will have about 4 minutes for their conversation and 2 minutes to hear observations from the timer.
- Instruct them to rotate so that each person plays each role.

The following guide for the listener is in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*:

1. Notice the open window.
2. Enter without prying.
3. Questions and follow-up questions. No advice.
4. Transition to action.
5. Affirm and keep the door open.

When all participants have talked, listened, and timed, take 10-15 minutes for questions and open discussion about any aspect of the workshop. Before you begin the discussion, review each part of the workshop to remind the participants about what they learned.

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Opening Prayer

Begin the prayer with these or similar words:

We will end in a similar way that we began. We have been called to be here today for learning, and those who will be blessed by this All Called program will be blessed because each of you have responded to the call. We are grateful that God has called us and will call others through us.

Scripture: Romans 8:22-28

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Reflection

Invite participants to arrange themselves in groups of three to discuss the reflection questions after the reading in the *Instruments of Calling Journal*.

Reflection Questions for Reading:

- *Now that you have completed this training program, what are you noticing in this reading about desire, need, hope, and calling?*
- *What does it now mean to you to be an instrument of calling?*

Closing Prayer

Close the discussion after about 5 minutes with these or similar words:

Let us pray: Thanks be to God that all of our needs and desires are generously responded to by our loving God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let us pray that we will always have open hearts to God's call and God's response to our calling. Let us also pray that we will open our ears to the callings of others so that the Spirit can work through us and the deepest hopes of humanity will be fulfilled. We offer our prayer in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Closing Song

Sing a song from your worship tradition that has a calling theme.



All Called

Instruments of Calling Facilitator Background

There Is a Voice

Churches throughout the world are trying to find their footing in the 21st century. The pace of change has shifted into high gear. Significant organizational change used to be a once-in-a-lifetime reality. Today, many organizations make big changes every year. . . just think of the fashion industry, for example. Sometimes churches can get lost and distracted in the dizzying movements of society, but there are some constants that can keep us grounded. There are foundational human experiences that churches can keep their eyes on to stay balanced and focused in these chaotic times.

There is a voice, a consistent voice, in the midst of turbulence that calls us to what matters most. God's voice is a stabilizing force that consistently and ceaselessly calls human beings to love each other in myriad ways as we navigate the often-unpredictable waters of daily life. Certain human experiences provide unique opportunities to clearly hear the voice of God calling out for a loving response. These experiences present themselves to people every day, and your church members can learn to spot them in their own lives and in the lives of others. Your church members can become instruments of God's calling processes assisting people as they strain to hear the voice. Christians have the opportunity and the obligation to interpret and amplify God's voice whenever and wherever it is spoken.

All Are Called

God calls out to every person on the planet every day of their lives! There is not just one calling; there are many callings in a person's life. While a person may experience a big, overarching life call, that same person in a thousand daily experiences hears the call to do something uniquely appropriate to this moment or do something else uniquely appropriate to the next moment as the details of a day unfold. We hear the many callings in friendship, the many callings in a workday, the many callings of parenting, the many callings to be patient, the many callings to forgive, etc.

A calling can come from within the person. It can also come from outside the person through other people. It can come through nature. The call can come through a wide variety of experiences in a person's life. Even an object might trigger a person's awareness of being called. Imagine what could happen if your church members got better at spotting God's calling voice in the regular lives of regular people they run into every day! Imagine what could happen if your church members could help these

people hear the call and respond to it in ways that make their lives more meaningful! Churches are in the business of transforming lives according to the law of love. Accompanying people in the spirit of calling is an important way to accomplish this core mission.

The church is called to help people connect to the calling that is already within and around them. That's precisely what the word religion means. It means to connect. Churches can help people who are not connected find the connections that will transform their lives in loving ways. That transformation might happen in your church, but it might happen somewhere else too. Where it happens doesn't matter; facilitating the process so it does happen is what matters.

While getting people to join your church is a worthy goal, there are other more central goals that churches pursue. One is the goal is to participate in God's life-changing callings wherever they happen. God is calling all people, and some are called to your church, but not everyone. Some might be called to another group that gathers in some other way. As you know, the point of church work is not to fill pews; the point is to transform lives, and lives are transformed by hearing and responding to God's daily callings. Our job as churches is to help people connect with God's call and encourage and empower them to follow that calling wherever it leads them. If we get really good at doing this, it would be hard to imagine churches becoming irrelevant.

Working with the Callings of People Who Don't Go to Church

This program is designed to help churches deliberately intersect with the lives of those who are unaffiliated with a church, but not in a way that provides clear answers and an invitation to join. Rather, this program is designed to spot God's work that is already happening in the lives of people who don't go to church. And when we spot that calling, we can point to it and encourage its unpredictable growth. This can be a great gift that churches offer to their communities, but we have to believe that God is already active in the lives of those who do not belong to churches.

If we really believe that God is the source of life, then there is no life without God's presence. Just because a person is churchless, that doesn't mean a person is Godless. To paraphrase or reinvent Jonathan Brooks' catch phrase from his book, *Church Forsaken*, there are no God-forsaken people, there are only church-forsaken people. Churches are called to accompany everyone and to resource everyone (not just members) as they listen to and respond to God's many ways of calling in their lives. This program will help your members follow that calling by sharpening their listening skills and encouraging them to engage with non-members in simple and powerful ways.

What Do We Mean by Calling?

Calling is God's way of getting good things done in the world without resorting to force. Calling is always invitational, never forceful. The person called is free to say yes or no to the call. When a need arises in the world, in a community, or in an individual life, God expresses a call to someone, some group, or maybe to all of us to respond in a loving way to that need. Calling is the way that God brings us together to meet the simplest and the most profound human and non-human needs.

Calling is God's way of getting good things done in the world without resorting to force.

For example, all people experience hunger and the need for food. This is a calling for someone to produce, deliver and/or prepare food for people. Those in need of food are the instruments of calling. Those who produce, deliver and/or prepare food are being called and are responding to it. The calling dynamic of need and response is present in every aspect of our lives. God is ceaselessly calling from you and to you to invite you and others into loving responses that build the deep connections that bind people together in supportive communities.

Let's think about a couple of other examples of how calling works in our daily lives. Even infants can be instruments of calling. When babies instinctively sense the need for human attachment, they may invite a parent or other adult to connect by making eye contact with the adult. This gaze is a call. It is an invitation to an adult to make a free and loving response. That response could be as simple as offering a smile or engaging in a game of peek-a-boo. The interaction builds trust and healthy attachment in the child which are foundational for successful participation in human community. This shows how calling is God's way of accomplishing good things in the world without force and how calling builds connections that we need not only for survival, but also for human thriving.

Consider the calling dynamic in friendship. Good friends often confide in each other about things that matter to them. Imagine a friend who is feeling directionless and expresses her need to get in touch with her sense of purpose and meaning in life. This experience of the need for purpose is a call. When a friend expresses this need, we can be instruments of calling by becoming curious about what the need means and exploring it with our friend. We can also notice and comment on the unique gifts that we see in this friend. God may use us as instruments to call our friends forward on their discernment journeys. While the Christian understanding of calling is multifaceted and mysterious, let's take a look at two dynamic movements of calling that we already illustrated in the examples above:

1. **Being called** is the process of being invited by God through relationships and/or experiences to become more aligned with your true self* in various aspects of your life.
2. **Being an instrument of calling** is the process of God calling others through you so they might respond to God's invitation to become more aligned with their true selves in various aspects of their lives.

(The traditional Christian phrase "true self" refers to you living as your best self. It's you when you work to nurture thoughts, actions, and feelings with a heart full of love. It's you when you put the greatest commandment of loving God and loving neighbor as yourself at the center of your daily living. Your true self seeks goodness for you and others in every situation. Your true self is the self as it is rooted in love.)

In this training program, participants will explore their own callings to become their true selves and prepare to invite others to explore their callings too. Now we will turn to the ordinary experiences of daily life through which God calls us to become truer expressions of ourselves, and in the call experiences, we discover a powerful opportunity to encounter God in diverse ways.

Eight Windows into Calling Conversations

God calls within the particular experiences that we have in our daily lives. Whatever is happening to us on any given day is the context of the calling. When we hear the call, we have a powerful opportunity to discover a unique expression of the divine. If I'm falling in love, I am being called in that relationship to experience God through human connection. If I'm mourning the death of a loved one, I am being called in the experience of grief to discover God the healer who moves through sadness to acceptance and peace. If I'm pondering a career change, I am being called to explore my God-given gifts and how they align with the world's needs.

There are countless windows that can open in a relationship that provide entry points for calling conversations, and we can't possibly name them all, so we will focus on eight in this program. The following eight significant and common experiences that people have are windows into calling conversations:

1. Building Loving Relationships
2. As You Are Today
3. Finding Meaning in Work
4. Moving through Life Transitions
5. Caring for a Person in Need
6. Sacrificing for Others
7. Experiencing Loss
8. Serving the World

Building Loving Relationships

Experiencing love is the pinnacle of human existence. Nothing matters more. God's identity is love, and love is the most powerful calling we experience. Spouses, parents, children, extended family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers call us to loving responses daily. Hearing and responding to this endless call to deepen our relationships is a key to spiritual maturity and deep joy. And when we find that our relationships are suffering, we are called to forgive and accept forgiveness to heal relationships and get back in touch with love. God the connector calls us in the experience of love and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine connection in human love.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is experiencing a call to go deeper in a loving relationship and equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

As You Are Today

God calls in the present moment of our lives no matter who we are or how things are going for us. When we are out of touch with who we are and who we are called to be, we can feel stuck. Life seems to be going nowhere or in circles. We wonder why we were put on this earth or wonder what our contribution is to humanity. Every person has God-given gifts that can help them become aware of their values and their sense of purpose. God calls us through our core identity, and the more we know about who we are, the more clearly we can hear the callings. God the gift-giver calls us in our core identity and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine creativity in the pursuit of meaning and purpose.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is stuck in their life-purpose discernment process and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

Finding Meaning in Work

As people who live in the post-industrial world, we have been formed to believe that much of the work that has to be done is meaningless and only has value because of the paycheck associated with it. Many people suffer through their workdays just to get to the weekend or the next vacation. There is a phrase that young adults use these days... “the Sunday scaries!” It refers to the foreboding feeling of dread that the weekend is coming to an end and the unfulfilling workweek is about to begin. Not feeling the Sunday scaries is a sign that one has found meaningful work.

While it is true that some work is demeaning, and many people work in terribly unjust systems that call us to work for change, many workers can find meaning simply by changing their point of view and discerning how they are being called at work. There are ways to hear God’s call in the work that we do, in the lives of our co-workers, in the goods and services we deliver, and in the lives of those who are touched by what we produce. God the creator calls us to shift our perspective to gratitude, collaboration, and service and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine creativity in daily work.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is trying to find meaning in their work life and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

Moving through Life Transitions

Family life is filled with transitions that members go through individually, but due to the strong connections between family members, every individual transition is also a whole family transition. As people move through transitions there is both a personal and a family call to let go of what is passing and to accept and celebrate the new growth that is possible. God is calling us in transitions to let some things die as other things are coming to life. Here are nine ways that families experience transitions:

1. From Single to Married
2. From Married to Divorced
3. From Couple without Children to Parenting
4. From Couple without Grandchildren to Grandparenting
5. From Pre-Schooler to School-Aged
6. From Elementary School to Secondary School
7. From High School to College
8. From School to Career/From Career to New Career
9. From Career to Retirement

God who resurrects calls us to move through transitions with hope and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine transformation in life-stage changes.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is moving through a significant life transition and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

Caring for a Person in Need

Offering up-close and personal care for a person in serious need is a unique experience. The grandparent of a child who has a parent addicted to drugs is called to respond in a focused caring way. The spouse or adult child of an older person with dementia is called to care in a deeply personal way. Many people in the healthcare field find themselves responding to the call to care for individuals who are suffering on multiple levels and to stay focused on the personal touch in the midst of healthcare complexities. This kind of care is a unique call from God to learn, to shuffle schedules, and sometimes to reorganize finances and other priorities all in the service of caring. God the healer calls us to intimate responses when suffering is right in front of us and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine vulnerability in a suffering person.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is working through the many challenges associated with ongoing personal care in serious situations and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

Sacrificing for Others

There is a unique call that some people experience that compels them to put the well-being and the safety of others above their own. The call to sacrifice can be experienced by parents, friends, healthcare workers, first responders, investigative reporters, and those in the military and even those who find themselves in unexpected disaster situations. Some people experience danger as a calling. They want to respond where the need is intense and when the stakes are high. God calls some people to strong courage and decisive action. God who is filled with courage calls us to move in the direction of danger when needs are urgent and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine fortitude in crisis moments.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is sensing that their call is to help in crisis situations and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

Experiencing Loss

There are many ways that people experience loss: loss of a job, loss of family or friends to death, loss of family or friends due to interpersonal conflict, loss of a marriage to divorce, loss of mobility as one gets older. Loss includes a call to acknowledge our fragility and our need for others.

It is an illusion to think that we can make it through life with pure individual effort. Loss reminds us that the personal connections we have with others are life essentials. In the experience of loss, God is calling us to connect more deeply with those who can support and sustain us through the losses we mourn. God who restores calls us to accept loss as a journey through weakness and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine peace as we rest in the supportive arms of those who love us.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is suffering due to a significant loss and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

Serving the World

While it is often easy to hear and respond to the call to love a spouse or a close friend, it is more difficult to hear and respond to the call to love and serve those who are suffering hundreds or thousands of miles away. Humans have an instinct to protect their own... those who are close to them. But our faith tradition is riddled with stories about loving the outsider and caring for the person who doesn't deserve our care. Christian faith calls us to rise above the instinct to care exclusively for our own and to respond to the multitudes who cry out for peace and justice no matter who they are or where they live. We have even recently become aware that the way we conserve natural resources is a way to respond to the call to care for countless people who won't be born for decades or centuries. This is the call to love in big ways. God who is universal and mysterious calls us to love more than we can imagine and opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine presence in the unknown.

This program will help your church members notice when someone is sensing the call to this biggest and most universal way of loving and will equip your church members to respond in helpful ways.

When someone is experiencing a calling moment, those close to them are called to engage them in calling conversations so they can hear the call more clearly. These common human experiences are windows that open in relationships, and people of faith can connect conversationally through these windows with people who are not affiliated with a church.

Engaging in Calling Conversations

There are simple do's and don'ts associated with impactful conversations with people who are experiencing a calling. Here are five guidelines to engaging in calling conversations.

Listen

We can learn to notice when someone is going through something important. By becoming more aware of the eight windows of calling described above, our sense of calling will sharpen. We'll notice when someone is talking about one of the eight windows. Noticing this can help us hear our own call to be an instrument of God's calling process.

Become Curious

When a relative, friend or co-worker expresses a need associated with one of the eight windows, we can express our interest with a simple phrase or question:

- "I'm not intending to pry, but..."
- "Tell me more about that."
- "That sounds big. What's going on?"
- "What do you think that means?"
- "What is that saying to you?"

Offer Focused Attention

We can signal to the other person that we are paying attention and their need matters to us in many ways. We can...

- Put the cell phone away.
- Turn toward the person.
- Make eye contact.
- Nod our head.
- Ask clarifying questions to show that we are really focused and trying to understand.

Resist the Temptation to Give Advice

Here are two rules to abide by to remind you not to give advice:

1. Don't tell a person what to do.
2. Don't tell a person what to think.

As 2009 research on the relationship between financial advice and decision-making by Jan B. Engelmann, C. Monica Capra, Charles Noussair and Gregory S. Berns illustrates, the brain “offloads” while it is taking in advice. The brain goes into neutral and the actual advice does not embed in the neocortex while the advice is being given. Learning is most powerful when it is self-motivated.

There are times, such as when you are asked for a specific piece of it, when giving advice is appropriate, but more often than not, giving advice is not helpful. Most people have the capacity and the resources to figure out their lives. This is not to say they can do it alone; they need support, but offering support and offering advice are entirely different. Most people need a sounding board rather than a friend or family member who plays the expert without the expertise. If someone wants your advice, they'll ask for it, but most people just want you to listen.

Here are a few exceptions to the no-giving-advice rule:

- If a person wants your opinion, they'll ask for it. In that case, feel free to offer it, but also reinforce with the person that you have no expectation that they will follow your advice. It's a gift you give freely with no strings attached.
- If you have professional expertise on the topic the person is exploring, you can let the person know that you know something about this topic and you're happy to share it if they want you to. For example, you are a grief therapist and the person is expressing a need to deal with a recent traumatic loss. If they agree to listen, then you are free to share. Then reinforce with the person that your expert advice is also a gift with no strings attached. They are free to accept it or reject it.
- If the person seems to be searching for ideas in the moment, you may offer to brainstorm a few ideas with the person. Then reinforce that your ideas are gifts with no strings attached.

Invite to Action

Inviting a person to action is not the same as giving advice. You can avoid the advice trap by following this simple pattern:

- Affirm that the person is pondering something real and significant
- Share that you know about some resources that could be helpful
- State that you don't need to know if the person uses it or not (This assures them that your concern is for them and not yourself.)
- If the person shows interest in the resources, provide access
- Close with, "If you'd like to talk more, you know where to find me, but these resources might end up guiding you to someone or some group that could help you even better than I can."

Calling is a powerful, life-changing experience that needs to be treated with the greatest respect. Only the one being called can make the free decision to follow the call. People are more likely to follow a call if they have loving support from others. Your church members can be that loving support for anyone in need of responding with freedom to a calling in their life.

