



All Called

Instruments of Calling Participant Journal

By Jim Merhaut

Instruments of Calling Program Goals

To prepare you to identify callings in yourself and in others.

To prepare you to identify when people may be open to discussing a calling experience they are having.

To empower you to initiate, sustain, and close calling conversations with people who are uninvolved or not affiliated with a church but are open to growing in their relationship with God.

Introduction

Scripture for Opening Prayer

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.

Discussion

In groups of three discussing the three questions:

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?

What is Calling?

Calling in My Life

Describe a time when you experienced 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.

Describe the details of what happened. There is no need to interpret the meaning of the experience at this point. Here are questions to guide your writing:

- What happened?
- What was the sequence of events?
- Who was involved?
- Where did the event(s) happen?
- What do you remember seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting?

Your Story

Your Reflection

How do you think God was calling you in and through the experience you described?

Ponder the roles love and freedom played in your calling experience and how needs were being met. Write your responses below. Pay attention to how God may have been calling you in more than one way in and through this experience.

Defining Calling

Calling is...

(record the group's responses below)

Calling is...

(write your own definition of calling below)

Eight Windows for Calling Conversations

Record your reflections on Video #2 below.

Building Loving Relationships

As You Are Today

Finding Meaning in Work

Moving through Life Transitions

Caring for a Person in Need

Sacrificing for Others

Experiencing Loss

Serving the World

Building Loving Relationships

Nothing matters more than the experiences of loving and being loved. 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.

People aren't perfect at loving, so we sometimes say and do things that damage our relationships. Life can seem dismal when our key relationships are off balance. 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.

Journaling Questions

Name two or three people with whom you experience a loving relationship. Think of these others as instruments of calling for you.

What have you learned about God through these relationships?

How does God call you through these relationships?

What is the connection between the experience of human love and God's identity?

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. Every person has both natural and learned talents. These are gifts that God gives to us through our families and our life experiences. You have these gifts right now! It can be uncomfortable to name and celebrate our gifts because we feel that may be self-centered, but if we recall that the gifts come from God, from our families, from our teachers, and from anyone who influences us in a positive way, we can experience our gifts with gratitude and give honor to God and others who planted the gifts in us. This is a true expression of self-love as opposed to shallow self-centeredness.

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. Our God-given gifts can help us become aware of our values and our sense of purpose. Our gifts are a key part of our 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.

Journaling Questions

Think broadly about your gifts, not just what you can do, but also who you are. Gifts include things like patience, perseverance, creativity, strong learner, good listener, faithful friend, lover of nature, worker for justice, good at organizing, etc.

What are your gifts?

How do you live your callings as expressions of your gifts?

How has clarifying your gifts and your values helped you get “unstuck” in your life?

What is the connection between your discernment of your life’s purpose and God’s generosity?

Finding Meaning in Work

Sometimes work can seem meaningless and that it only has value because of the paycheck we get for doing the work. 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 feeling of dread as 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 God opens the door of opportunity to encounter divine creativity in daily work.

Journaling Questions

How is your work a calling?

What are the various ways God calls you at work?

How is seeing your work as a calling a way to experience your work as more meaningful?

What is the connection between human work and divine creativity?

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. God calls us *from* something old *to* something new.

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.

Journaling Questions

Identify one life transition in which you experienced a particularly powerful call from God.

What were you called to let go of?

What were you called to that was new?

How is the experience of a transition connected with the presence of God's call?

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. This kind of care is a unique call from God to learn, to shuffle schedules, and sometimes to reorganize finances 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.

Journaling Questions

Write about a time when you were up close and personal with a person in profound need.

Who was this person?

What was your initial impression of the situation?

How did you, as an instrument of calling, respond in the short term and in the long term?

How was the person's vulnerability connected with the presence of God's call?

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, 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.

Journaling Questions

Describe a time when you sacrificed in a significant way for someone or some group or describe a time when you were inspired by the sacrifice someone else made for others.

In the situation you described, how did you feel called?

In the Scriptures we are taught that love casts out fear. How does the call to sacrifice connect us to divine courage?

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.

Journaling Questions

Describe a significant loss you have experienced.

What was it like to be more fragile or weak as a result of the loss?

What was your calling experience in this state of fragility?

To whom did you turn for support? How was that support restorative for you?

How was your own experience of fragility a way to connect with God?

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 love and protect their own... those who are close to them. But can love be bigger than that? 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 our effort to 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.

Journaling Questions

Write about your experience of responding to the call to love and care for those close to you versus your response to love and care for those who are far away from you.

Given the limits of time and resources we all experience, what are some ways you can respond to the needs of those who aren't a part of your inner circle of family and friends?

What is the connection between universal human concern, serving in big ways beyond our borders, and the mysterious identity of God?

After Reflecting on All Eight Windows

What are you learning about God?

What are you learning about yourself and others as instruments of calling?

What are you learning about calling?

What are you learning about loving others?

God is revealed in unique ways depending on the experiences we are having. There are unique attributes of love that we can discover if we listen to the call within a given experience. Here is a list of suggested attributes that you might experience as you reflect on each Window of Calling. What other attributes would you add to the list below in the third column for each of the windows of calling?

Window of Calling	Suggested Attributes of God	Additional Attributes
Building Loving Relationships	Connection	
As You Are Today	Gift Giver	
Finding Meaning in Work	Creator	
Moving through Life Transitions	Resurrection & Transformation	
Caring for a Person in Need	Healer and Vulnerable	
Sacrificing for Others	Courageous	
Experiencing Loss	Restorative and Supportive	
Serving the World	Universal and Mysterious	

Enter & Experience Engage & Explore Embrace & Encounter

From Disconnected to Connected

Enter	Engage	Embrace
The First Experience	Personal Exploration	Interpersonal Encounter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I see a sign in the neighborhood I see a social media post I tell a trusted neighbor, friend, or family member about a longing I have I see an invitation on a diner placemat <p>Bridge to Engage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> URL or link to resources A trusted neighbor, friend, or family member points me to a free resource. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I explore a website I buy a book I download a free resource I sign up for a blog I listen to a podcast I view a video I sign up for a newsletter <p>Bridge to Embrace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I sign up for a live introductory webinar I have a conversation with a trusted neighbor, friend, or family member who agrees to mentor me or put me in touch with an affiliation group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I join a Facebook group I take an online class I join a coffee-shop discussion group I work with a coach I join a book club I attend a program I join a church <p>Staying in the Embrace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I build relationships I prioritize relationships I clarify my life purpose I clarify my core values I clarify my life vision I clarify my life mission I develop daily spiritual practices I evaluate my journey I look for new ways to enter and engage

How to Start a Calling Conversation

The main thing to do when starting a calling conversation 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?"

How to Sustain a Calling Conversation

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?

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.

Powerful Questions & Follow-Up Questions

To help a person get to the heart of the matter:

- What aspect of this is most important to you?
- What does this most important part mean to you?

When you are unclear on something or missed something the other said:

- What else can you tell me more about that?
- Give me an example of what you mean?
- What does that word/phrase you just used mean to you?
- Please repeat that. I'm not sure I got it.
- I'm sorry, I was still thinking about the other thing you said. Please repeat that last part?

To lay the foundations for potential solutions to emerge:

- How do you want this to end?
- If all goes well, what will the result be?
- What do you want to be celebrating at the end of this journey?
- What are some things you might do to learn more about this experience your having?

To assist their spiritual journey:

- What role is God playing in this?
- How is the Spirit moving in your experience?
- How is God calling you through this?
- What is God calling you to do?

How to Transition to an Invitation to Action

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?

How would you say this in your own words?

How to Close a Calling Conversation

Here's what you might say:

1. *"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. *"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."*

The first statement affirms their discernment; the second keeps the door open in case the person discovers some interesting content on the website and wants to talk more with you.

How would you affirm and keep the door open? Use your own words.

Detached Presence Conversation

Commit to practicing detached presence with someone in your life.

I will strengthen my skill of detached presence by having a conversation with _____ within the next two days.

During this conversation I will focus on two things:

1. Asking questions rather than expressing my own opinion. I will use open questions, questions that can't be answered with a yes or no response, more than closed questions.
2. Making observations about what I'm hearing, and then letting the person verify whether or not my observation is accurate. For example, "It seems like you are saying that if you had more clarity about what really matters to you, you might be able to make decisions better. Do I have that right?"

Note: Making an observation is not parroting back to the person exactly what they said; rather, it is expressing your understanding of what they said to give them an opportunity to see it in a different light or to correct your understanding. They will then either light up because you understood and gave them some new insight, or they will correct you to give you a better understanding of what they are trying to say. Either response is a victory for you as a detached listener.

Noticing the Open Window

What will I see or hear from a person who is opening a window for me to see that they are pondering a calling related to their work?

Practice

Here is a 5-step guide that you can use to practice a calling conversation:

1. Notice the open window.
2. Enter without prying.
3. Questions, follow-up questions, and observations (verify observations) – no advice.
4. Transition to action.
5. Affirm and keep the door open.

Scripture for Closing Prayer

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.