

**​GROWING FAMILIES 2018-2019**

**SESSION ONE**

**Called *by* God in Multiple Ways ​**

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God I pray,When I hear a call, may I awaken to your voice.When I awaken to your voice, may I say yes.When I say yes, may I follow faithfully.When I follow faithfully, may you bless me with the grace to give my life away.When I give my life away, may all your people be blessed.

Amen.

**Part 1. Introducing "Calling"**

Calling and vocation is a central part of the Christian life, encompassing:

* *who we are called to be*—the core of our identity, as created by God and baptized in Christ, and sent forth to serve by the power of the Holy Spirit;
* *how we are called to live*—our commitments of lifestyle and relationships, including marriage, parenting, or the single life;
* *what we are called to do*—the work, service and activities that fill our daily lives, including paid or professional work, volunteering, homemaking, raising children or caregiving.

As a theological concept, calling and vocation has received renewed attention in recent years, expanding beyond traditional definitions of ordained ministry to include the diverse ways we are called:

* by the God who created us
* to particular kinds of work and relationships
* as the people we are, with our gifts, talents and resources
* in a variety of circumstances, whether joyful or difficult
* from difficult situations or times of transitions
* through the example, invitation or mentoring of other people
* for the service of others
* within the life of God who is love

We are called *by*God, who is the source of our callings. We are called *to*follow the way shown by Jesus and taken up by his disciples; this calling we share with each other. We are called *as*unique persons with a particular history and circumstance. We are called *from*the losses and grief we suffer over time, so that we can embrace life again. We are called to give our lives *for*others, not simply for our self-improvement or fulfillment. We are even called *in*our deepest suffering to carry out God’s purposes in mysterious ways. We are called *through*the people in our lives, because vocation takes root in community. And, finally, we are called together to live *within*God’s loving embrace, both now and in the life to come.
​​(From: *The Stories We Live: Finding God's calling All Around Us*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.)

**Part 2. Reflecting on "Calling" in Images ​**

Use the Calling Images to name your experience of God's calling in your life. Select one image that illustrates your experience of calling. After reflecting on the following questions, share your answers with a small group:

* How does this image capture your experience of calling?
* What emotions/feeling surfaced in you as you look at this image?
* What does this image tell you about your view of God and how God is involved in your life and in your calling?

**Part 3. Exploring Three Images of "Calling"**

* ***Vocation is like an acorn***: experiencing God’s call as a precise plan, or at least having a strong sense from childhood that God has called you to a particular role, relationship, or gift. Something has been given to people to do. A person’s life could only become one thing like an acorn becoming an oak tree.
* ***Vocation as a pilgrimage****:* experiencing God’s call as a journey. Pilgrims experience a call to follow a particular way and trust that what they need will emerge as part of the journey. Pilgrims must walk to figure it out: to learn as they go, to struggle under difficulty, and even to fail at times. As a pilgrim, being called by God means trusting in God’s companionship no matter what happens along the way. Callings become a response that requires that we discern the path with God’s guidance.
* ***Vocation as a surprising discovery***: “Aha!” experiences can reveal a direction or purpose that people might not have seen or understood, even though it was right in front of them. People discover an ability or develop a passion; they are awakened to a gift, and they fall in love in way that never leaves them. Regardless of whether that gift becomes paid employment, many people find that callings are rooted in something they are given to do and love doing for others.

 Each of these images—acorn, pilgrimage, and surprising discovery—is a key way to experience God’s call. The images tell us that vocation is something we make with God, who can be known and named as planner, walking companion, and gift giver. In this sense our experiences of God and vocation are better understood on a continuum from the highly detailed to the less precise, with everything in between.

Some people experience callings as a choice they make, while others sense that they have no choice but are born into their vocation or given gifts they must use. When you hear God’s call in your life and in the lives of those around you, remember to affirm that God has many ways, not just one way.

God does not create us *with*a vocation (one single plan that God has made), but with the capacity for vocations (that ability to engage in dialogue with God and others to create a plan for our life). Vocation becomes then, a creative act, something we create with God and others, unique to each of our lives.

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**Part 4. Reflecting: How Do You See Your Calling?**

Reflect on the three questions below and share your answers with a small group.

1. Is your calling in life like an acorn, a pilgrimage, or a surprising discovery?
2. Recall a story from your life that illustrates why you chose your type of calling.
3. What images of God come to mind from your experience of calling?

**Closing Prayer**

When God calls and you say “no,”may God open your ears and change your heart.When God calls and you say “maybe,”may God nudge you closer to your true self.When God calls and you say “yes,”may you listen and embark on the journey in faith and joy.

Amen.