



CREATING A CULTURE OF CALLING

Children's Faith Formation Program *Discovering Calling in the Bible*

Introduction

This children's faith formation program uses the approach to calling and vocation described in the book *The Stories We live* by Kathleen Cahalan (Eerdmans, 2017).

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, 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.)

Content: 14 Calling Stories in the Bible

1. Abraham: Genesis 17:1-9
2. Moses: Exodus 3:1-17
3. Deborah: Judges 4:1-16
4. Ruth: 1:1-17
5. Samuel: 1Samuel 3:1-10
6. Elijah: 1Kings 19:1-16
7. Jeremiah: Jeremiah 1:4-10
8. Isaiah: Isaiah 6
9. Mary: Luke 1:26-38
10. Disciples of Jesus: John 1:35-51
11. Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10
12. Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42
13. Paul: Acts 9:1-30
14. Timothy: 1Timothy 4:6-16

These stories seek to capture one or more of the ways that God calls us. Emphasize this through the learning experiences built around the calling stories.

- Called by God in Multiple Ways (e.g., Mary—Acorn, Timothy—Pilgrimage, Paul – Surprising Discovery,
- Called as We Are (e.g., Moses)
- Called from People, Places, or Situation (e.g., Abraham)
- Called for Service and Work (e.g., Paul)
- Called through Each Other (e.g., Deborah)
- Called in Suffering (e.g., Ruth and Naomi)
- Called by the God Within (e.g., Elijah)

Approaches

The fourteen calling stories can be used in a variety of ways in children's programming, for example: 1) a multi-session unit in weekly classes, 2) a mini-course (e.g., four sessions), 3) a monthly session on calling, 4) a vacation Bible school program on calling, 5) a children and parent program, daylong retreat, and/or camp experience, and 6) a family at-home program.

Methodology: Process for the Sessions

1. Share the Bible Story

Present the Bible story in one of two ways: 1) show the video and then read the story from a children's Bible, or 2) read the story from a children's Bible and then show the video.

2. Provide a Brief Commentary on the Story

3. Reflect on the Story

Use "I wonder..." statements to engage children in reflecting on the Bible story. Use these three questions and feel free to add your own:

- I wonder what part of this story you liked best....
- I wonder what ___ (featured person in the story) ___ thought about God's call or invitation or promise or challenge to them....
- I wonder how ___ (featured person in the story) ___ felt about their calling from God....

4. Examine the Story

The calling stories seek to capture one or more of the ways that God calls us. Identify the type of call experience as you examine each calling story.

- Called by God in Multiple Ways (e.g., Mary—Acorn, Timothy—Pilgrimage, Paul – Surprising Discovery,
- Called as We Are (e.g., Moses)
- Called from People, Places, or Situation (e.g., Abraham)
- Called for Service and Work (e.g., Paul)
- Called through Each Other (e.g., Deborah)
- Called in Suffering (e.g., Ruth and Naomi)
- Called by the God Within (e.g., Elijah)

Many of the calling stories follow a pattern. Examine the story to uncover the pattern in the person's response to God's calling/invitation/challenge. For example, the sixth chapter of Isaiah follows a biblical pattern:

1. The person has some experience of God. Isaiah has a dramatic vision of God in the Temple.
2. God gives the person a mission. God sends Isaiah to speak to the people.
3. The person may deny being worthy. Isaiah knows he has unclean (or sinful) lips.
4. God addresses the denial and reassures the person. God purifies Isaiah with fire and words of forgiveness.

5. Explore the Story

Provide a variety of ways for children to explore more deeply the story through a variety of mediums. Here are examples:

- **Art:** illustrate the person's response to God in the Bible story
- **Journal:** write how you might have responded if you were the featured person in the story; what would you have said and done
- **Drama:** create a dramatic re-enactment of the Bible story
- **News Report:** create a news report as an "on-the-scene" TV reporter describing the events of

the story for the TV audience

- **Write a Prayer:** create a prayer, inspired by the Bible story, for all children today

Calling Stories with Commentary from a Children's Bible

For more commentaries on the Bible stories consult The Text this Week: <http://www.textweek.com>.

Abraham: Genesis 17:1-9

Your mom might say, "Clean your room, and I'll take you to a movie." If you say yes, you've made an agreement. You each promise something. In this Bible story, God made an agreement, or covenant, like this with Abram.

God told Abram always to do what was right. Then God make Abram wonderful promises. God said that people, kings, and nations would come from Abram. God even renamed him Abraham, which means "faith of many nations."

Moses: Exodus 3:1-17

God's people, the Israelites, suffered greatly as slaves in Egypt. They had to do very hard work, such as building cities, and planting crops. Their bosses, the slave drivers, were cruel. When the king was afraid that there were too many Israelites, he got rid of their baby boys! When the Israelites cried out, God hear and came to help.

God chose Moses to speak for him. God even told Moses his personal name. That name is I AM. God told Moses that Moses would lead the Israelites to a rich and fertile land.

Deborah: Judges 4:1-16

When the Israelites first live in Canaan they had no kings or presidents to rule them. Judges were their leaders. The judges solved problems for the people. Some judges led their armies. One judge, Deborah, was a married woman. This is a surprise because in those days men were the leaders. Women took care of children and cooked. But God chose Deborah to lead his people for him. Deborah was such a good, strong leaders that everyone looked up to her.

One day Barak refused to command an army against an enemy unless Deborah went with him. He knew that God worked through her. And just as Deborah had said, the Israelites won the battle. Just as God worked through Deborah, he can work through you.

Ruth: 1:1-17

A true friend is someone who stands by you even in times of trouble. Ruth as a true friend to Naomi, her mother-in-law. Naomi's husband and two sons died in Moab. Naomi was very sad. With no man to support her, Naomi had to go back to live with her family in Israel.

Ruth as from Moab, not Israel. Yet she was a loyal friend to Naomi and chose to go back to Israel with her. Ruth can have stayed in Moab like Orpah, the other daughter-in-law. Instead Ruth loved Naomi enough to give up her own way of life. Ruth would live and die in Israel where she didn't know anyone. She accepted Naomi's God as her God. Ruth is a model of real love.

Samuel: 1Samuel 3:1-10

God called Samuel to be his servant when he was just a boy. Samuel lived with the old priest Eli. Israelites like Eli and Samuel believed that God was present in the ark of the Lord. One night Samuel was asleep near the ark. Suddenly, Samuel heard his name. Thinking that Eli was calling him, Samuel ran to him. This happened two more times. Each time, Eli sent Samuel back to bed. Finally, Eli realized God was calling Samuel. Eli told Samuel the next time to say, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." And that's exactly what Samuel did.

God did not give up calling Samuel. God speaks to you too. He speaks through the world he made, the Bible, and your parents. Are listening to God?

Elijah: 1Kings 19:1-16

Many beautiful things happen in silence. Flowers grow, snow falls, butterflies fly, and God speaks. In this Bible story from First Kings, God didn't speak to Elijah in the loud crashing sounds of a storm or an earthquake. He didn't speak in a crackling fire. God spoke in a whisper when Elijah was alone. Today God still speaks softly. He doesn't shout to us over the sounds of the television. He doesn't speak in a booming voice or blow horns to get our attention. In order to hear God, you need to get away from noise. Then God has a chance to talk to you. He will speak in your heart. You might hear God tell you to do something. Or you might hear him say, "I love you."

Jeremiah: Jeremiah 1:4-10

God calls certain people to do special work for him. He called prophets to speak for him. In this Bible story from Jeremiah, God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet before Jeremiah was born. But Jeremiah didn't think he could carry out his role. He told God that he picked the wrong person! He told God that he did not know how to talk to other people about God. Jeremiah said he was too young for such an important job.

God did not accept Jeremiah's excuses. God promised to be with Jeremiah and protect him. Jeremiah was a great prophet the rest of his life. God has a plan for you too. He wants you to be a follower of Jesus. He wants you to tell others about him. You are not too young!

Isaiah: Isaiah 6

Mary: Luke 1:26-38

In this Bible story, Mary was just a teenager when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. He told her that God chose her to be the mother of Jesus, his son. He told her that Jesus would be a great king. His kingdom would last forever.

This was a great responsibility for Mary to accept. She did not understand how it could even happen. But Mary knew that God was good and loving. Calling herself God's servant, Mary put herself in his hands and said, "Yes." When we say yes to God like Mary did, we can also expect good things to happen.

Disciples of Jesus: John 1:35-51

Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10

When Jesus came to Jericho, a crowd gathered. Because Zacchaeus was short, he couldn't see Jesus. Standing on tiptoe and jumping up and down didn't help. So Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a tree. Now this was not something that an important man like Zacchaeus would normally do. But Zacchaeus didn't care. He wanted to see Jesus very badly.

Zacchaeus was rewarded for his efforts. Jesus spotted him in the tree and stopped. Even though people thought Zacchaeus was a sinner, Jesus treated him with love. Then Jesus honored Zacchaeus by going to his house. The story of Zacchaeus teaches that nothing should keep us from being with Jesus.

Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

Paul: Acts 9:1-30