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## Adult Small Group Facilitator Guide

## *The Stories We Live: Conversations about Calling*

This adult small group experience uses the book *The Stories We Live* as the primary content for the eight small group sessions. Groups of approximately 8-12 people will meet in small groups, led by a facilitator or facilitators. It is recommended that each person purchase a copy of *The Stories We Live* by Kathleen Cahalan (Eerdmans, 2017). The book is available in Our Giving Tree Bookstore for $10, or from online retailers like Amazon.com. A Kindle e-book version is also available from Amazon.com.

All generations will be experiencing the themes of *The Stories We Live* in age-appropriate ways and in occasional Growing in Faith Together (GIFT) intergenerational gatherings (Aug 29, Oct 3, Nov 14). We encourage everyone to participate in the GIFT nights and to include them in their plans for the study. A calendar of dates is provided below.

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| --- | --- |
| Meeting times are 6:30-7:30pm unless otherwise stated **Aug 29 - GIFT Night: Called to Follow Jesus**  Sept 5 – Chapter 1. Called *by* God in Multiple Ways  Sept 12 – Chapter 2. Called *to* Be Followers of Christ  Sept 19 - Chapter 3. Called *as* We Are  Sept 26 – Ch 4. Called *from* People, Places, or Situations  **Oct 3 – GIFT Night: Sharing our Stories**  Oct 10 - Chapter 5. Called *for* Service and Work  Oct 17 – Chapter 6. Called *through* Each Other  Oct 24 - Chapter 7. Called *in* Suffering  **Oct 31 – “The Monster Gospels” - 5:45pm FC  No *TSWL* Small Groups this evening**  Nov 7 - Chapter 8. Called *by* the God Within  **Nov 14 – GIFT Night: Callings All *around* Us** |  |

## Guidelines for Small Group Conversation

**Called to welcome others as Christ**. According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, all people are to be “received like Christ.” We invite you to give and receive welcome by your words and actions towards others in the group.

**Called to be present to each other.** We all lead busy lives; that is why our time together is so important. As much as possible, focus your attention and energies on being engaged with those around you. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

**Called to share and to keep silent.** What is offered in this circle is by invitation, not demand. As we read in Ecclesiastes, there is “a time to be silent, and a time to speak.” No one is ever forced to respond to any question. We honor the right of each individual to decide when he or she feels called to share.

**Called to honor each voice.** We invite you to share from your own unique story. No individual speaks for an entire group or a whole profession. This is a space to set aside competition and to celebrate the different ways God works in each of our lives.

**Called to listen with the “ear of your heart,”** according to the Rule of Benedict. This is a space for listening and learning from each other, not for critiquing or offering advice. While the group may provide support, we are not here to “fix” or “save” each other. Offer questions instead of counsel.

**Called to reserve judgment and turn to wonder**. Whenever people interact, disagreements naturally arise. But we invite you to turn from judgmental attitudes which stifle communication, to an attitude of wonder which opens the heart. If you find yourself reacting strongly, turn inward and ask yourself: “*I wonder why this person feels this way. I wonder why I feel such a strong reaction. I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself*.”

**Called to respect our differences**. Our time together is a conversation, not a debate. We invite you to learn from others and from yourself, to tap the sources of wisdom in the group and in your own heart.

**Called to keep confidentiality**. Vocation is a deeply personal topic, and we respect the sacredness of our stories: our fears and failures, sorrows and successes. The circle of the group provides a space that is open to share within, but closed from sharing outside. What is shared in the circle stays in the circle.

**Called to pray**. When the group leaves from this space, we invite you to hold each other’s lives and stories in prayer until you meet again. Following the Benedictine rule of “ora et labora” (prayer and work), we hope that your time together will enrich both your prayer and your work when you are apart.

(Guidelines adapted from Parker Palmer’s “Circle of Trust ‘Touchstones’” from the Center for Courage and Renewal. To learn more about the Rule of Benedict, visit the Order of St. Benedict: [www.osb.org/rb](http://www.osb.org/rb))

## *The Stories We Live* Small Group Schedule

**Facilitator(s):**

**Contact Info:**

**Room:**

#### The Meeting times are 6:30-7:30pm unless otherwise stated

**Aug 29 GIFT Night: Called to Follow Jesus**

Sept 5 Chapter 1. Called *by* God in Multiple Ways

Sept 12 Chapter 2. Called *to* Be Followers of Christ

Sept 19 Chapter 3. Called *as* We Are

Sept 26 Ch 4. Called *from* People, Places, or Situations

**Oct 3 GIFT Night: Sharing our Stories**

Oct 10 Chapter 5. Called *for* Service and Work

Oct 17 Chapter 6. Called *through* Each Other

Oct 24 Chapter 7. Called *in* Suffering

**Oct 31 “The Monster Gospels” with Jason Korsiak, 5:45pm in Fellowship Center  
No *TSWL* Small Groups this evening**

Nov 7 Chapter 8. Called *by* the God Within

**Nov 14 GIFT Night: Callings All *around* Us**

## Session 1. Called *by* God in Multiple Ways

**Supplies Needed**

* Leader: Chapter 1 in *The Stories We Live*
* Participants: *The Stories We Live.* Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
* 1 Set of Visual Faith Images, provided by the Adult Ministries Office.

#### Welcome, Schedule and Guidelines (8 minutes)

Welcome everyone to the group, and invite them to make a nametag if they haven’t already. As this is the first session, there are some basic logistics items you’ll want to go over. Pass around the class roster and ensure that you have the contact info for everyone. You may want to share your phone number and email address with the group so they can contact you in case they will need to miss a session or have a question. You’ll also want to review the class schedule, highlighting the two remaining GIFT nights (Oct 3 and Nov 14) and reminding them that we will not have small groups on Oct 31. Instead, there will be a special program by Jason Korsiak called “The Monster Gospels” in the Fellowship Center at 5:45 that evening.

This first session is a great time to go over the Group Guidelines, which will provide a common frame for your time together. The “Guidelines for Small Group Conversation” are on page 2 of these notes. Copies for your group will be in your classroom at the first session. Invite group members to read these aloud, and to ask clarifying questions if they have any. The group should feel comfortable modifying language if they feel it is necessary for clarification and the comfort of the group.

#### Opening Prayer (1min)

You may pray your own prayer or use the prayer below. This prayer is from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*, an anthology compiled by Laura Kelly Fanucci.

Eternal God,

our beginning and our end,

be our starting point and our haven,

and accompany us in our shared journey.

Use our hands

to do the work of your creation,

and use our lives

to bring others the new life you give this world

in Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all. Amen.

[*Book of Common Worship*, Presbyterian Church (USA)]

#### Part 1. Introduction: Concept of Calling and Vocation (5 min)

Introduce the concept of calling and vocation using this information from Kathleen Cahalan (kuh HAY lan).

For the purposes of this course, “vocation” and “calling” are interchangeable terms. The word “vocation” comes from the Latin *vocare*, meaning *to call*. Today, “vocation” has come to mean or job or profession, but the truth is we each have many vocations or callings within and beyond our daily work. Our call to follow Christ is the common vocation of all Christians.

Vocation 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

Kathleen Cahalan in the introduction to the book *The Stories We Live* explores different ways of talking about calling.

* She says it could be seen as a noun (p. xi) – something that we possess, which can end up standing static.
* Another way of talking about calling is as a verb. Here we see action, a nag or a push that God does in us or to us. This helps us to understand that callings are a response to God and to others.
* She argues that another part of speech explores calling even better – prepositions. They connect words to other words and describe relationship. She takes this as a way to explore calling in the book, hence the prepositions on the book cover, and in the chapter titles.

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. Explore: Calling and Vocation in Images (20 min)

This exercise will use the Visual Faith process to help people name their experience of calling and vocation. As a facilitator, you can learn a bit more about the Visual Faith process by watching the 6 minute video online at [**bit.ly/VisualFaith**](http://bit.ly/VisualFaith). The image sets will be in your classroom, or you can get a set of image cards from the adult ministries office in advance.

Spread the “Calling Images” on the table for all to see. You may want to do this before your meeting time. You should be generous with the images, and allow them to overlap in a haphazard way. Sifting through the images is part of the process. We suggest having 8-10 times the number of images on the tables as are in your group.

Ask people to select an image that reflects their experience of calling and vocation. If they don’t know what that might be, ask them to select an image that speaks to them – there is no “wrong” image to select. Then ask them to form small groups of 4-6 people and share their story:

* How does this image capture your experience of calling and vocation?
* What emotions/feeling surface 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 and vocation?

When all of the groups have concluded storytelling, invite people to share their insights about calling and vocation the emerged from their image experience.

#### Part 3. Presentation: Three Images of Vocation (5 min)

Present the three images of vocation from Chapter 1 of *The Stories We Live*.

Is your calling more like an ACORN, PILGRIMMAGE, or SURPISING DISCOVERY?

**Vocation like an acorn**: experiencing God’s call as a precise plan, or at least having a strong sense from children 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.

OPTIONAL VIDEO: An example of a “surprising discovery/Aha!” story is “Ken’s Story” from Lives Explored Video Program. If you would like to show the video, it is about 8 minutes long. You can stream it at [**bit.ly/AHAken**](http://bit.ly/AHAken). It is also available on disc and thumb drive from the adult ministries office.

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 these 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.

#### Part 4. Reflection: How Do You See Your Calling and Vocation (15 min)

Ask people to reflect on the following questions and share their responses in small groups:

* Consider your callings: Are you more like the acorn, the pilgrimage, or a surprising discovery? Share a story that illustrates why you chose your type of calling.
* What images of God and vocation come to mind from your callings?

#### Closing Prayer (2 min)

You may use this prayer or another of your choosing.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures

of which we cannot see the ending,

by paths yet untrodden,

through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with good courage,

not knowing where we go,

but only that your hand is leading us

and your love supporting us

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[from Evening Prayer, *Lutheran Book of Worship*.   
orig. attributed to Eric Milner-White and George Wallace Briggs in *Daily Prayer*]

## Appendix 1. Scripture Passages on Calling and Vocation

#### Stories of How God Calls

* In silence (Elijah): 1 Kings 19:11-13
* In silence: Isaiah 41:1
* In dreams: Matthew 1:18-25
* Within ourselves: Luke 1:39-45
* In darkness: Job 4:12-16
* Through mysterious encounters: Luke 1:26-38
* In moments of blinding clarity: Acts 9:1-19
* In moments of internal revelation or insights: Galatians 1:11-17
* Through conversation with strangers: Genesis 18:1-15
* Through Scripture and through other people: Acts 8:26-40
* Through the activity of work: Jeremiah 18:1-6
* When we go out in search of God: Luke 19:1-10

#### Stories of How our Plans Are Embraced within God’s Loving Plan

* Jeremiah describing the relationship between God and people: Jeremiah 29:11-14
* Jesus praying for God’s will, not his, to be done: Matthew 26:36-46
* Zechariah and Elizabeth learning to trust in God’s surprising call: Luke 1:5-24, 57-80
* Keeping confidence in God though you stumble: Proverbs 3:21-26
* Naomi and Ruth’s journey together from despair to hope: Ruth 1-4
* Paul’s perspective on his sufferings in light of Christ: 2 Corinthians 11:24-12:10

#### Stories about how God Calls Us in Multiple Ways

* Jesus feeding the 5000: Mark 6:30-43
* Jesus’ encounter with Mary and Martha: Luke 10:38-42
* Paul’s emphasis on the unity of our life’s calling: Ephesians 4:1-6
* Lydia’s call to conversion, leadership and hospitality: Acts 16:13-15
* The variety of gifts the Spirit gives for the common good: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 12:27-31
* Abraham and Sarah receiving a new calling in old age: Genesis 18:1-15

#### Stories about how God Calls in Times of Struggle

* Hannah and her infertility: 1Samuel 1:2-18
* How God meets us in our suffering: Psalm 107:1-32
* Moses’ despair and God’s call to continue leading his people: Exodus 17:1-7
* Jesus healing Simon’s mother-in-law who then gets up to serve: Mark 1:29-31
* A prayer for help in times of pain and difficulty: Psalm 22
* Jesus’ call to the crowd to take up their cross and follow him: Mark 8:31-35
* How God calls through and beyond our present suffering: Romans 8:18-39
* Jesus calling his followers into new relationships after his death: John 19:25-28

#### Stories of God Calling over Time

* For everything a season: Ecclesiastes 3:1-18
* Paul on how we mature in faith by growing up into Christ: Ephesians 4:11-16
* Patience in waiting and watching for God’s vision to be revealed: Habakkuk 2:1-3
* God’s faithfulness from youth through old age: Psalm 71
* Jeremiah called by God as a youth: Jeremiah 1:4-10
* Anna and Simeon experiencing a call fulfilled at the end of their lives: Luke 2:25-38
* Peter describing the evolution of his calling: Acts 10:34-48

## Appendix 2.

## Video Resources on Calling and Vocation

### Collegeville Institute *Lives Explored* Video Program

#### <https://collegevilleinstitute.org/vocation-projects/resources-for-congregations/lives-explored>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCR5ELYhtrvW7rnThE8aBnYQ>

These videos feature people sharing their stories of calling. You may find them helpful to spur conversation in your group. Where a particular video might connect with a particular theme, it is noted in the leader guide. You may stream them if you wish, or they can be played on the classroom AV equipment from a thumb drive or DVD. Contact the Adult Ministries Office for a thumb drive or disc.

**Gaye’s Story:** When Gaye’s husband died, it was a shocking blow to her faith. See how she found God in surprising ways through her grief.

**Joyce’s Story:** After domestic abuse and divorce, Joyce felt called by God from chaos to a new vocation. See how this surprising twist allowed her to serve others.

**Obey’s Story:** As a young child, Obey felt a calling to serve. Watch how his community led him into new (and messy!) service he never expected.

**Monica’s Story:** Monica is no stranger to hard questions—in corporate communications, she has wrestled with the meaning of her work. Hear what she discovered about the importance of story-telling and community.

**Sarah’s Story:** In college, Sarah decided to step outside her comfort zone—even with the risk of failure. Discover how she brought her authentic self to her work in corporate America.

**Jane’s Story:** Jane had just gotten her biggest break as a Hollywood actor. But when she walked onto Sunset Boulevard, she felt empty. See what happened when Jane made a surprising career change.

**Ken’s Story:** Ken discovered his calling late one night whittling at his table. Watch how his dream of woodcarving led to inspiration from the strangest places.

**Sherice’s Story:** Sherice doesn’t feel her work is her calling. But she still feels called by God in her workplace. Listen to her song of giving her life away.

**Peg’s Story:** When Peg retired from teaching, she struggled with identity loss. Find out how she put the pieces back together to find new meaning.

**Francois’ Story:** As a new immigrant in New York City, Francois found himself in crisis, wondering what God wanted from him. Discover how a career he never expected brought him deep joy.

**Angela’s Story:** Angela struggled as a stay-at-home mom after a career in interior design. See how she learned to share her creativity in a new way.

**Lauren’s Story:** Lauren struggled in her 20s with loss and uncertainty. Hear how work became her saving grace.

**Jean’s Story:** As an accountant Jean prayed whenever she had to change jobs. See how surprising opportunities have showed up on her doorstep.

**Denise’s Story**: Denise’s husband said he couldn’t hear any more stories from her work as a judge. Find out how Denise learned to be present in the courtroom but not carry work home with her.

**Mary Margaret and Ken’s Story:** When Ken was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, his wife Mary Margaret struggled to pray—until a doctor helped her trust God again. Learn how this couple found a new calling to help others.

**Paul’s Story:** As a health care expert, Paul has to manage the “default calendar” of his time. Check out five practical questions he uses to make decisions.

**Adam’s Story:** Adam didn’t like the way he was treated as a teenager. Watch how his work in theatre and therapy with teens challenges stereotypes today.

## Vocation: How Does God Call Us to Live our Faith?

## *Four Visual Poems*

### Faith and Leadership (Duke Divinity)

<https://www.faithandleadership.com/vocation-how-does-god-call-us-live-our-faith>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FaithandLeadership/videos>

**Vocation as Worship:** Ella Russell, the creator and owner of E-dub-a-licious Treats, sees each task of her work in the bakery as an opportunity to honor God. As God provides Ella with the resources and opportunities to do good work, Ella returns to God thanksgiving and praise and leads a community of people to delight in what God is doing in her life. Ella compels us to reflect on how our daily lives become an act of worship.

**Vocation as Service**: Entrepreneur and boot-maker Joshua Bingaman encourages us to reflect on how Christian vocation goes beyond service to the self and connects to the deep needs of the community. Joshua’s story of healing and transformation in community is creatively retold through his work as a boot-maker. Joshua challenges us to humbly serve others in all that we do.

**Vocation as Obligation:** Jillian “JJ” Simmons invites us to consider how Jesus’ love obligates us to live differently, reflecting Christ in the world. JJ’s faith in Jesus compels her to go about her work as a radio personality, nonprofit leader and mother with a drive to bring change in the world. Her grateful obligation inspires a renewed courage to follow the call God places in our lives.

**Vocation as Commission**: Sculptor Anthony Suber challenges us to get to the work of telling the story of God’s love in tangible ways, fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission. When we answer God’s call and begin to see the imperfect parts of ourselves and others with new eyes—God’s eyes of love—we are able to tell a different story about those imperfections. With God’s eyes of love, we are commissioned to live differently.