



# God's Sovereignty and Our Calling

Your Purpose in God's Plan



## Memory Verse

*"...join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."*

**2 TIMOTHY 1:8-9**



## Discussion starter:

When you think of a special calling in your life, how do you generally define it?

- Your occupation or career?
- A special task that you are called to do?
- The use of the talents and gifts that God has given to you?

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Your calling may involve all or some of these things; however, these factors are only a *partial perspective* of the biblical meaning of your calling. You must also consider the answers to questions such as: How does the Bible *define our calling*? How can it be *discovered*? What does God use to help us *fulfill* this calling? How does it relate to the sovereignty of God?

## The Call Defined

Your call is a specific predetermined plan by the eternal God to participate in His eternal purposes to bring Him glory in Christ Jesus. *Corporately*, it is related to God's call for the body of Christ. *Personally*, it involves your unique role in the body of Christ. *Eternally*, it relates to God's universal purposes in world redemption. Every aspect of your entire life is involved in your calling—from your conversion, to your character, your family, your faith, your unwise choices, your free responses, your birth place, and your personality traits. It is that **unique, individual** call for which you were created and designed to fulfill in history.

## Two Categories of Our Calling

- A. The first category of our calling is **general**. Remember, the general call is universal and external or outward.
- B. The second category of our calling is **specific**. Remember, the specific call of God is internal or inward. It is not only heard in the ears, it is also felt in the heart. This speaks of the unique calling that God has given to His children. Read the verses below to discover the specific calling that we as believers have:
- 1 Peter 2:9: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 1 Peter 4:10: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 1 Peter 1:14-16: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Hebrew 3:12-13: \_\_\_\_\_

## Three Types of Calling

The two categories of our calling are general and specific. However, there are three types of callings that we see in the Bible as well:

- A. The first is a call to \_\_\_\_\_. (*Romans 8:29-30; Galatians 1:15-16a*)
- B. The second is a call to \_\_\_\_\_. (*Acts 13:2*)
- C. The third is a call to \_\_\_\_\_. (*2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Ephesians 1:4*)

## What Does God Use to Prepare You to Fulfill His Calling?

Through both the Old and New Testaments, God has given us portraits of people whom He has called specifically for a unique work. Looking at these people, we can discover some key components to discovering God's call.

### A. Component #1: Your Background

The place of your birth, as well as your parents, the timing, and the environment are all key components of your unique call. The Bible tells us that God sovereignly determines the country and the place where each person will be born (*Acts 17:26-27*). Since God does all things with a purpose in mind, the place and environment into which you were born relates to God's calling on your life. Let us consider how your birthplace relates to your calling.

- Read Acts 9:10-11. Where was Saul born? \_\_\_\_\_

Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul, was born in a Roman colony, which made him an official citizen under Roman law. Later, when Paul was about to be scourged because of his testimony for Christ, it was prevented because it was unlawful to scourge a Roman citizen (*Acts 22:25-29*). Do you think this was just a coincidence?

Tarsus was a place known for its education. It was a university city, the center of culture, and the meeting place for philosophers and poets. There is no doubt that Paul's great thirst for knowledge and his understanding of different philosophers and cultures was aided by this environment in which he was raised.

The main industry of Tarsus was making tents out of goat hair. As a student of Gamaliel, Paul was required to learn a trade so that he could eventually teach without becoming a burden to the people. Paul took up this occupation of tent making, which later proved to be a great help in his missionary work. It also became a point of connection with two believers at Corinth named Aquila and Priscilla (*Acts 18:1-3*).

All of this was under the sovereignty of God.

Think of the place and the environment where you were born and raised. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is unique about the place where I was raised?
- What did it teach me?
- How could that knowledge help me to identify with, and minister to, someone today?

## B. Component #2: Unique Experiences

By now, we should know that everything that happens in our lives is under the sovereignty of God. This means God either causes it or allows it. In either case, He is in control of it. By looking at the positive and negative unique experiences of our background, many times we can see God's hand providentially guiding us to fulfill His call. Let us consider how unique experiences relate to God's calling.

- **Read Acts 7:17-22.** What positive, unique experience did Moses have growing up?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Joseph, on the other hand, had some negative experiences in his past. He was sold by his brothers into slavery (*Genesis 37*), and was falsely accused and imprisoned (*Genesis 39*). However, these experiences would later prove to be a part of the sovereignty of God. Because of God's unique plan for Joseph's life, he was given the ability to interpret dreams (*Genesis 40-41*). Because of God's favor and Joseph's faithfulness, his gifts made room for him at the top of Egypt's monarchy (*Proverbs 18:16*). God used Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's gift of interpretation to set the stage for a famine that He would orchestrate to bring His people into Egypt. This sovereign plan would also bring reconciliation to Joseph's family (*Genesis 15:12-16*).

Whether the experiences are positive or negative, God uses the unique experiences of our background to teach us about His calling for our lives. Listen to Joseph's perspective of God's sovereignty:

- **Genesis 50:20**—*"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."*

1. As you look back on your past, what are some positive experiences that God has used to shape you into the person you are today?  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is a negative experience that God has used to shape you into the person you are today? \_\_\_\_\_

### C. Component #3: Special People

God always seems to bring certain people into our lives to help us move toward His goal. With Abraham, it was *Melchizedek* (*Genesis 14:18f*). With Moses, it was *Jethro* and his daughter, *Zipporah*—Zipporah saved Moses' life (*Exodus 4:24-26*) and Jethro saved Moses' ministry (*Exodus 18:17ff*). With David, it was *Jonathan* (*1 Samuel 20*). With Paul, it was *Barnabas* (*Acts 9:26ff*). What special people has God brought into your life who have led you closer to Him and His call?

### D. Component #4: Significant Events

Henry Blackaby, in his book *Experiencing God*, calls these "Spiritual Markers." These are events that God uses to transition you from where you are to where He wants you to be. Important decisions are made during these times.

The significant event in Thomas' life was when he saw the risen Savior (*John 20:26-29*). A significant event in Barnabas' and Saul's lives came when they were in prayer while assisting the church at Antioch (*Acts 13:2*).

These events can occur while listening to a sermon, having a devotion, or at any time. Oswald Chambers called them "God's surprise visitations."

According to Paul's testimony in Acts 26:12-14, how did the significant events that God orchestrated occur?

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- **Discussion:** Can you share one significant event that God used to guide you closer to His call?

### E. Component #5: Character Builders

Character builders are tests that God uses to shape you into a person He can use. Spiritual usefulness brings great blessings upon your life and your family. It also brings great temptation and responsibility. To whom much is given, much is required (*Luke 12:48*). Character is not something one is born with naturally; it is something that must be developed and strengthened through testing and obedience. Faith that is not tested cannot be trusted.



## Application

Skillful application of divine truth for the glory of God

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God's calling becomes clear as one obediently follows the direction that he has already been given. God does not reveal His entire plan for our lives at once; He reveals just enough for us to know that it is Him, then He requires obedient faith. As we walk with Him, He begins to unfold for us the particulars of His call.

- Has God called you to a particular ministry in the body?
- Have you made steps of obedience to move in the direction that God is calling?
- Are you using your gifts to fulfill the Lord's call? How?
- How intimate is your fellowship with God right now?
- Is there a need to renew your intimacy so that you might hear His voice better?
- What costs are associated with the pursuit of His call?
- Do you need to recall in your mind the first time when God spoke to you about this calling and refresh your perspective of it?

Close this time in prayer and meditate on these verses:

**Psalm 138:8**—*"The LORD will accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting; do not forsake the works of Your hands."*

**Psalm 55:22**—*"Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken."*

**Psalm 18:30**—*"As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the LORD is tried; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him."*

**Psalm 16:8-9, 11**—*"I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely...You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."*



## Serving Under the Sovereignty of God

Discerning God's place of service for you

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**Principle to practice:** Wisdom comes as we consider four tools: 1) the Bible, 2) your circumstances, 3) the counsel of godly people (2-3), and 4) prayer.



## Singing Under the Sovereignty of God

Hymns to help you worship

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### Profile: FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL (1836-1879)

Frances Ridley Havergal was born in Worcestershire, England. Her Father was clergyman, writer, composer, and hymn writer. She struggled with poor health throughout her otherwise quiet life. Havergal College—a private girls school in Toronto—was named after her. Read her hymn carefully and prayerfully. Underline the parts of her life that she consecrated to God, and ask yourself, “have I done the same?”

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### TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE CONSECRATED

Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord to Thee  
Take my moments and my days  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee,  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing  
Always only for my King  
Take my lips and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee,  
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect and use  
Every pow’r as Thou shalt choose,  
Every pow’r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my love my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure store;  
Take myself and I will be  
Ever, only all for Thee;  
Ever, only all for Thee.

Take my will and make it Thine  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart it is Thine own,  
It shall be Thy royal throne,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.



*Is my desire an intent to love God with all my heart, above all earthly relationships?<sup>1</sup>*



*Do I consistently seek to know and to do the will of God in the practical, daily matters of life?<sup>2</sup>*

### TAKEAWAY FOR TODAY:

When Jesus calls a person, He calls them to a life of complete and comprehensive surrender to His Lordship. All that we once used and pursued for our own selfish gain is to be employed in the service of our Savior King and the hymn writer leaves no stone unturned. If God, by His sovereign choice, has called you and adopted you into His family, ask Him to continue to give you the grace and the desire to live a sold-out life for Him!

## Answer Key

### Two Categories of Our Calling

B.

- proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness
- employ our gifts in serving on another
- be holy
- encourage one another

### Three Types of Calling

A. salvation

B. service

C. holiness

### What Does God Use to Prepare You to Fulfill His Calling?

#### A. Component #1: Your Background

- Tarsus

#### B. Component #2: Unique Experiences

- he was educated as an Egyptian

3. answers will vary

4. answers will vary

#### D. Component #4: Significant Events

Unexpectedly, during the normal course of life

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#### Resources:

<sup>1</sup>DeMoss, Nancy Leigh. *Brokenness, Surrender, Holiness*. Moody. 2008 pp. 209-215.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.