

# STUDENT SERMON ON VOCATION AND CALLING

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The goal / purpose of this sermon "is to help the hearers **recognize** God's call on their lives, and to **equip** them to joyously live out their calling in every sphere of life on earth".

### Introduction

When I was a child, my brother had a toy called a magic eight ball. Does anyone remember this toy? For those who do not know what I am referring to, this was a toy that looked like an oversized eight ball from a pool table. It was about the size of a softball, it was black with a white number eight on one side, and a see through screen on the other side. It was made from a hard plastic and it was filled with some kind of purplish dark fluid. In the liquid was a twenty-sided block that contained various sayings on each of its sides. These included such sayings as "It is certain", "Without a doubt", "Most likely", "Yes", "Signs point to yes", "Ask again later", "Cannot predict now", "Don't count on it", my favorite – "My sources say no", and so on. This toy was meant to foretell or predict the future. We would ask it a question, shake it, and turn it over to see the screen. The block inside would slowly rise up to the screen and give us its answer. It was a lot of fun for some of the silliest of childhood questions we asked it. Wouldn't it be great if all of life's difficult decisions could be answered and dealt with in such a simplified way?

(Pretend you are holding the magic eight ball in your hands)

Should I attend college? What should I do with my life? Should I get married? Should I work there? Should I live there? Should I own my own home? Here is a difficult one in today's political climate - should I vote for Clinton or Trump? Should I have children, if so how many? Should I help my adult children or grandchildren? What should I do with my life after retirement? The list of questions goes on. Life is complicated and messy. It is difficult making decisions, isn't it? It is difficult determining God's will, isn't it? We all want to make the right decisions that will lead us and those we love to the greatest amount of joy and happiness. We want to make decisions that will enable us and our loved ones to live life to the fullest!

Today, I would like to share a message with you about how God has called us to serve him in our daily lives, especially in our vocations and places of employment. Over the past few years, you all know that I have been attending seminary. When I first started seminary four years ago, I was not sure exactly what I wanted to do with this degree. Throughout my time in seminary, I continued to struggle with this question. As I began my internship last year at Holy Spirit Anglican Church, the questions started to become more clear, but still remained just as difficult. You all know we had to make a difficult decision to leave this wonderful community to go where we felt the Lord was leading us. Now if I would have just had a magic eight ball, the chances

would have been good that it would have told us to stay and we wouldn't have had to experience the level of grief that was associated with leaving ☺ But seriously, over this past year I have struggled to understand my own calling into the Anglican Church as an Anglican Pastor. I have prayed and prayed that God would show me his will. That he would open and close the right doors. I have agonized about what he would like me to do. I think we can all relate to this, can't we. Again, this is where a magic eight ball would be very handy, but this is not how the Christian life works, does it?

## **Body**

As Christians, we turn to the Bible when seeking to know what God's will for our lives is and how we should live. It is essential for all matters of faith and practice. When choosing a career path for the first time, or a second, or a third...or even when wondering what we can do post-career in retirement, turning to the Scriptures is an important part of the process of determining what God would like us to do. As Christians, we know that our lives are not our own. We live in submission to a higher power and to a higher purpose. Therefore, we cannot leave God out of the equation when it comes to something as important as what we wish to do with our lives, since God's plan and purpose are the guiding light by which we have chosen to live our lives. He calls each one of us to become united to himself in every aspect or sphere of our lives – not just on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings. We must overcome the kingdom of the self, and the kingdoms of the world – and submit to and help usher in his kingdom wherever we go and whatever we do. We must understand that there is not a dichotomy, that is a separation, between our Sunday worship and our secular work. In our work, in our play, in our worship, every minute of every day we are called by God to live for him and glorify his holy name. Our work, or what we do with our lives on a daily basis, can be, and in fact must be, just as holy as our worship is this morning. Therefore, we need a paradigm change in the way we see our lives – we do not worship God only at church or only on Sundays. Instead, we must worship God as living sacrifices Sunday morning through Saturday night, with every inch of our being in every context we find ourselves.

There are several ways which God chooses to reveal himself to us, the Bible being only one of those ways, albeit one of the most important ways. However, the Bible is not some magic answer book. We cannot shake it like a magic eight ball ask it a question, randomly open it up and let the pages fall open freely, and expect a divine answer revealing God's holy will to pop out at us. The Bible does not work this way. Instead, we must look at how God has revealed himself in the Scriptures, how he has defined reality and truth in the Scriptures, and the expectations and responsibilities he has placed on his people in the Scriptures. There is a plan and purpose for Scripture, and we must seek to understand what it is holistically from Genesis to Revelation. We must understand Scripture as a story that God is inviting us into to experience and live out. When we find our place in his story – that is – in Scripture – we find our true and ultimate purpose in life. At that point, whatever we do must align with his story.

I would like to point out one very important presupposition I am working from this morning. When did God implement work, was it before the fall or after? If he implemented work after the

fall, then we can reasonably assume that “work” or what we do with our lives, is a result of the fall. We can conclude that “work” is a result of sinful creation, and therefore we can think of it as being bad or burdensome. This kind of thinking might also lead us into the belief that eventually, when Christ returns, he will do away with work completely, and in the new heaven and in the new earth we can do whatever whenever however wherever we please – of course as long as it is holy. But, Genesis 1 and 2 reveal a different story. Long before the fall, God put Adam and Eve to work. Genesis 1:28 says, “And God blessed them and said to them ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it.’” Their job was to procreate and to take care of the earth. Again, Genesis 2:15 says, “the Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Since God created Eve to be a helpmate to Adam, we can reasonably assume she was to help Adam in his work in the garden and keeping it well maintained. Notice that this happens before the fall in chapter 3! In Isaiah 65, speaking of the new heaven and the new earth, Isaiah reveals to us that we “shall build houses and inhabit them; we shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit...we shall long enjoy the work of our hands...” Therefore, work, or what we do with our lives on a daily basis, should be seen and understood as being a good part of God’s good creation. It was there before the fall, and it will be there in the new creation. Simply put, our work is one way in which we worship God and it should bring him glory and honor. Of course not all work is God honoring and glorifying, nor does all work allow us to worship God to our fullest potential. As with all things following the fall, the holy and righteous understanding of work has been tainted by sin. The burden of work is a result of the fall and is part of God’s curse on man because of his rebellion and sin, but work itself should be understood as inherently good. In the new heaven and the new earth, the curse will be removed, there will no longer be burden associated with it. Work will be redeemed along with the rest of creation – and praise be to God for that.

With that, in determining what it is that God is calling each one of us to do vocationally, we see in Scripture two definite ways in which God calls his people and what he desires of them to do.

- a. First, Scripture reveals that some are called to a specific plan with a specific purpose. That is, God speaks directly to them.
  - i. In Genesis 12, Abraham is called to leave his country and his people and to go to the place that the Lord will show him. The calling of Abraham was for the purposes of establishing the Jewish people and Jewish nation. Because Abraham listened to and followed what the Lord told him, these things came to pass.
  - ii. In Genesis 6, God commanded Noah to build an ark. It probably took Noah fifty-five to seventy-five years for him and his family to build the ark. Thus, building the ark became Noah’s and his family’s purpose and calling in life. Of course, they probably raised animals and worked the land as well, because that was their only way of sustenance during that time. But their primary purpose was building the ark.

- iii. In Exodus 3, Moses is called by God to lead the people and nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt and out from under the rock of slavery, into freedom and into the Promised Land. Just think what would have happened to the people of God if they had not followed Moses and either stayed in Egypt or returned there after they had left when they were complaining about their hardships in the desert? We would not have the Jews, nor a savior today. But because God spoke to a certain individual and desired from him to follow a certain path, and because this person listened to God, great things eventually happened to the nation and the blessings that were promised to Abraham and his descendants began to be fulfilled for all people in all nations.
- iv. While there are many others in the Old Testament who were specifically called by God (David, Samuel, Isaiah just to name a few), let's jump to the New Testament. In the New Testament we have Peter and the other disciples who were all called by Jesus, whom we cannot forget was God incarnate, to come and follow him. While many of them already had other careers and vocations (fishing, tax collecting, and housework), when Jesus called them to follow him, he essentially called them to a new way of life and to a new way of living. They were no longer fishers of fish, but of men and women. The disciples dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus. For the next three years, they travelled around with Jesus, learning from him and doing ministry with him. After his death and resurrection, and immediately before he ascends into heaven, Jesus commands the disciples to "go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." He gives them a specific purpose and calls them to a higher plan.
- v. Now these callings are all exceptional cases. For the majority of us, however, God will most likely not speak directly to us and call us like he has these individuals. This is not to say that God doesn't speak directly to us today, he does. But for most of us it will not be at the same level or magnitude that it was for these individuals. Some of us will be called to do great things for God and we might even get into the history books because of it, but none of us will be eternally memorialized in Scripture like these individuals and their callings were.

When reading Scripture, isn't it easy for us to want to be like protagonists of the story? We start believing that since it happened to Abraham, Noah, Moses, Peter, and the other disciples, that it will somehow also happen for us in the same way. We place ourselves into their story, and expect that it must be the normative experience for all of God's people. However, we

must take a harder look at what is actually going on in Scripture. In some cases, we must even look between the lines. We must be careful when making Scripture normative for our experiences, because sometimes we go too far and make some parts normative that were never meant to be.

In this specific case, we must remember that there were many other individuals besides those in these stories. While God spoke directly to Abraham, what about his father or wife or nephew and his wife. While God spoke directly to Noah, what about his other family members. While God spoke directly to Moses, what about the other two million Jews who made up the Jewish nation. While Jesus called his twelve disciples, what about the three thousand on the day of Pentecost? What are we to believe or conclude about all these other individuals? How did God speak to them? How did he call them? It is obvious that they were not "called" in the same way as these other individuals. Therefore, I am more inclined to believe that most, if not all of us today, are more like these other individuals whom God did not speak directly to. Like them, God will not speak directly to us at the same level and magnitude as Moses and the rest. When God spoke directly to these individuals just mentioned and called them to do specific things, God was going above and beyond the normal circumstances for humankind. These were extraordinary and miraculous callings; they were not normative. But for everyone else, God has laid out and revealed specific guidelines for how humanity in general and his people specifically were meant to live and carry out their daily lives.

- b. Therefore, the second way in which God calls his people and reveals his will to them is through a more general call from divine revelation. Vocationally, this allows the people of God to do various things with their daily lives, and still be inside the will of God. This will be freeing for most of us who worry about discerning and understanding God's perfect will for our lives, because it implies that as long as we remain within these covenantal guidelines we remain within God's will. It might also be helpful to refrain from thinking that God has a rigid perfect will for us, where we must determine that exact path or the exact vocation or the exact person that he has purposed us for.
  - i. Instead, let us first look at how God accomplished this in the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, God established various relational covenants with certain individuals and peoples. A covenant is just a fancy theological term that has a similar meaning as contract. Adam and Eve had a different covenant than Noah, likewise Noah had a different covenant than Abraham. The persons involved in each of these covenants were free to act and behave any way they desired, as long as they did not overstep or blatantly disregard the covenant itself. For

instance, Adam and Eve had only one restriction in the Garden of Eden...that was not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could do anything they wanted, but had to stay away from one tree and its fruit. They failed to live up to their covenantal responsibility and experienced God's wrath. Perhaps the greatest covenant worth mentioning today is the Mosaic covenant. In this covenant, God begins to fulfill his promises to Abraham and establishes a special relationship with the Jewish people and nation. Now we cannot go into great detail concerning this covenant, but it basically comes down to this – follow and adhere to God's law, which he gave through Moses. The Mosaic law and covenant are found in the first five books of the Bible. This law had hundreds of rules and regulations, the greatest of them being the Ten Commandments, which were meant to help guide and direct the nation of Israel in their daily lives. It told them how they were meant to relate with God, with one another, and with the nations and peoples around them. It defined the physical and spiritual boundaries they were meant to live by.

So, an Israelite in the Ancient Near East who was under the Mosaic covenant could be a mason, a carpenter, a homemaker, a merchant, a fisherman, or many other kinds of jobs that were prevalent during this period. They had a general call to follow and obey the Mosaic law and rules, and they could be and do anything as long as it was in accordance with this covenant they were called to live their lives by. The best way to summarize what they were called to do is what Jesus reminds us of in the two greatest commandments – they were called to love God and love their neighbor.

Before moving on to the New Testament, it is important to point out that God did not give the Israelites a set of laws in order for them to follow the laws as an end in and of themselves. There was a higher plan and purpose for these laws and for the Jewish nation. They were meant to be God's representatives on earth. They were supposed to be God's witnesses to the nations around them and to be his light in their darkness. The laws and rules that God gave them were meant to aid and assist them in living a holy and righteous life, one which the other nations around them would look at in awe and not just see another nation like themselves, but the very presence and heart of God in their midst. They were meant to be the vehicle through which God's blessing would come. The problem, however, was that the Israelites didn't live up to their covenantal responsibilities and failed to heed and follow the commandments of God. Instead of being God's witnesses to the nations, they ended up mirroring the nations around them and they lost sight of God. However, in God's divine sovereignty, he utilizes their rebellion and sin for his good and for his purposes. Thus, the prophets of God proclaimed that one day soon, God's

kingdom would truly come through the coming of the promised messiah. Blessings would come to all nations, just as God had predicted, through Jesus the Christ, his son. Praise be to God!

- ii. This brings us up to the New Testament. The New Testament reveals that Christians are no longer bound to the Mosaic Covenant and the laws and rules it contained. Instead, they are under a new covenant that Jesus instituted through his life, death, and resurrection. The kind of life a Christian is supposed to live under this new covenant is best described in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus lays out for his disciples the kind of life God's people are meant to live. It also highlights the kind of character they are supposed to manifest. God's people under the new covenant are meant to be poor in spirit, humble, meek, hungry and thirsty for God's righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, the light and salt of the world, and so forth. Elsewhere in the New Testament we are reminded that the Christian life is really about becoming more like Christ. Christians go to church, read their Bibles, practice the spiritual disciplines, take communion, listen to sermons, attend small groups and Bible studies, and serve the community as ways to both become more like Christ and at the same time to incarnate the presence of Christ into all of those contexts. Their purpose is not to make us holier than thou, super-spiritual, or more knowledgeable than others. They are meant to make us more like Christ in order for us to manifest Christ to others. This is one of the principle ways in which God is at work in the world today.

This new covenant is also one that is focused on God's grace and mercy; Christians are no longer bound to the law but to grace. At the same time, those under this new covenant are empowered by God's Spirit, and not by personal human endeavor. The more we surrender to God's Spirit, the more God's Spirit can use us to do his work in the various contexts we find ourselves in. For some Christians, they believe they only have to act "Christianly" at church and surrender to his Spirit while actively worshipping him in his presence at church, but in their homes, at their places of employment, and in their communities they become anything but like Christ. They have segregated and partitioned their lives between the holy and secular, which we now know is a false dichotomy. In those places they have built their own kingdoms where the Spirit of God is not welcomed. Finally, this new covenant is all about God's in-breaking kingdom into the world. With Jesus' coming, the Kingdom of God has arrived. Jesus calls all believers to be part of establishing God's kingdom on earth in every sphere of their influence and life. Just as the Israelites were meant to be the light of God to the nations around them, now it is through the lives of Christians in every nation that God's kingdom is shown. That is why it is so important for us to have vocations in every

segment of society, and to work as unto the Lord (Col. 3:23) and for the common good of all. Wherever we go and whatever we do, in our work and in our play, every minute of every day, we are called, as Christians and reconcilers of God, to manifest and incarnate the kingdom of God into all of life. This is what God has purposed the new covenant for, and his church is meant to carry it out.

We need to be ambassadors of God's truth and light in every sphere of our existence. This means something more than simply telling others that Jesus loves them, or getting people to repent of their sins. It is true that Jesus loves all people, and it is true that people must repent. But it is equally true, that the manifestation of God's light and truth in the sphere of everyday lives out in the world is a result of people bringing the goodness of God and the fruit of the Holy Spirit with them wherever they go. You are called to bring God's kingdom with you when you go to work, when you volunteer with the PTA or HOA, when you are on vacation, when you have to deal with someone you dislike, or wherever you are. Therefore, as Christians trying to determine what God is calling you to do, it is paramount to remember that when your actions are in line with God's Word you fulfill his will for you as his disciple as revealed in Scripture.

One last thing before I finish. Evil prevails in the world because there is an absence of goodness. Goodness overcomes evil, and not evil over goodness. So, when you leave here today, seek to bring with you the goodness of God. When you go to work tomorrow, seek to bring the goodness of God with you. What does this look like? Let's turn to Galatians 5:22-23 where we see what walking in the Spirit of God looks like.

1. **Love** those you work with, don't hate or quarrel with them. This is an unconditional type of love. You should be willing to embrace your co-workers, bosses, colleagues, acquaintances, warts, sins, failures, and all. To open yourself to them unconditionally is following in the footsteps of Christ our savior, who, upon the cross, opened his arms wide to us unconditionally and welcomed us all into his loving embrace.
2. Be **joy**-filled and content in all things and with all people, with those you cannot stand and with those you hate. Joy comes from the knowledge that good does win in the end. We know the end of the story: God wins! We win! So, no matter the evil you see in the world, learn how to embrace others as brothers and sisters, even when they sin against you for this is what God has done on your behalf even though you sin against him.
3. Remain **faithful** even when the actions of others or your bosses at work request you to be less than faithful. Do not lie, or steal, but have the moral courage to stand up for the goodness you know must prevail. If you, a Christian, doesn't do this, who will?



4. Remember to be **gentle** with everyone. This means looking past their offenses, their ignorance, their hate and anger, and their injustice against you and others for this is what God does for you. This also means not being harsh or unkind, but calm and mild mannered. It means not becoming arrogant in your correction of others. Seek to understand their point of view. While people will no doubt frustrate you, walking in step with the Spirit means you will not let it cause you to sin against them when they do.
5. Be a **peacemaker** in all that you do and seek to build bridges of peace between those around you. People are difficult. But as a Christian you cannot be one of these kinds of people who everyone else doesn't like to be around. Jesus said, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Take note that if you consider yourself a child of the Most High, a defining characteristic of your life will be that you will seek to bring peace into every sphere of your life. We serve a God of peace who desires that all of creation be reconciled to this peace.
6. Be **self-controlled** in all that you do. This is a term that means you do not try to live your life according to your own desires and wants, but seek to be controlled by God's indwelling Spirit. Being self-controlled means you do not manifest the works of the flesh, which all stem from your kingdom, instead of God's kingdom. Under the new covenant, however, God has empowered his people to overcome the kingdoms of the self and the kingdoms of the world, in order for them to live in and manifest his kingdom wherever they are.

Doing these things, and many others outlined in the New Testament, establishes God's kingdom on earth, and this is the heart of God's will for us today, no matter what vocation we are in or what we eventually end up choosing to do with our lives. So, do not fret, and do not worry. Do not agonize over what God is calling you to be and do today. Instead, in whatever God has gifted you in and wherever your heart leads you, if you are surrendered to God's Spirit, trust that whatever vocation you end up in is right for you not because you have found or discerned it to be God's perfect will for you, but because you have remained in his will all along. Now go and be a kingdom builder wherever you are.

### **Closing Prayer**

I leave you with the following prayer. It is modified from the book entitled *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* by Steven Garber.

Please pray with me.

“God of heaven and earth, we pray for your kingdom to come, for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Teach us to see our vocations and occupations as woven into your work in the world this week. For mothers [and fathers and grandparents] at home who care for children, [for children who care for their mothers and fathers] for those whose labor forms common life in this city, the nation and the world, for those who serve in the marketplace of ideas and commerce, [for those in IT and the computer sector, for those who serve in the military and as contractors], for those whose creative gifts nourish us all, for those whose callings take them into the academy of all levels and sectors, for those who long for employment that satisfies their souls and serves you, [for those who are now retired and no longer know what they can do for you and your kingdom, for our growing and maturing children who have not yet decided and discerned what it is you are calling them to], for each one we pray, asking for your great mercy. Give us eyes to see that our work is holy to you, O Lord, even as our worship this day is holy to you. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”