

**“Are You Missing Your Calling?”**

I Peter 4:7-11

*Sermon Series: Hope Rising Week 6.*

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Has your whole future ever depended on the luck of someone’s draw? All eyes in that Washington D.C. auditorium were fixed on the fish bowl that sat center stage. Their lives, their destinies were stuffed into that aquarium. A blindfolded man plunged his hand into the fishbowl, pulled out a capsule and handed it to President Franklin D. Roosevelt who read, “The first number is 158.”

Instantly, a scream rose in the hall. Mildred Bell knew that was her son Harry’s number. 21-year-old Harry was planning to get married next week. Now he was drafted into the army. Harry was among six thousand registered young men between the ages of 21 and 35 who held number 158. In precincts all across the country, they became the first soldiers in America’s peacetime draft. “Some were pleased and proud to be the first number called, others said they’d make the best of it, still others were upset at their bad fortune.”<sup>1</sup> A little over a year later the U.S. entered World War II.

Today, America has no draft. But in the kingdom of heaven, God is calling your number. The Lord calls the numbers of all those He saves. You are a follower of Jesus Christ, because God called you. The Apostle Peter puts it like this:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10

God calls you out of the world to be saved. You are called to be a child in God’s family, a priest in God’s Temple, a citizen of God’s nation, a member of God’s chosen people. You are called out of darkness into His wonderful light. At the same time, you are called back into the world to serve Him. Peter says God calls you so “that you may declare His praises,” and tell others about Jesus. You and I are called to be ambassadors from God’s Kingdom, to be servants of the living God. We are called to worship the Father, walk with the Son, work with the Spirit, welcome seekers and wrestle against the evil in this world. We are sent to help the weak, feed the poor, heal the sick, release the prisoners, and tell the Good News. God calls your number and mine. You and I are drafted to serve.

A member of Woodside sent me a joke clipped from a magazine. In it, a man named Doug comes out of worship on Easter. His pastor says, “Hi Doug, how come you only attend worship on Christmas and Easter? Why don’t you come the rest of the year? We could really use you in the army of the Lord.” Doug replies, “I am in the army of the Lord, pastor.” Then leaning forward he whispers, “I’m in the secret service.”

Friends, God doesn’t have a secret service. When it comes to serving God there are two mistakes - one made by people and the other by pastors. People wrongly view the church

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<sup>1</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time* (Touchstone, 1994), pp.186-87

as a “volunteer organization” where the majority of people who serve are unpaid volunteers. This may be true for a cheerleading squad, a soccer club or the PTO. The church is the family of God. You don’t pay your family to be with you. You don’t say to your spouse, your parents or your children, “I’m just volunteering my time to help you out. But once my three year term is up I’m going to take a break or try another family.”

The words “volunteer” and “voluntary” never appear in the Bible. The word “choose” appears 66 times but it almost always refers to God choosing us as when Jesus said, “You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last” (John 15:16). The word “called” shows up over 500 times. You are:

- Called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6)
- Called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)
- Called to be holy (I Corinthians 1:2)
- Called to live in peace (I Corinthians 7:15)
- Called to one hope (Ephesians 4:4)
- Called by His grace (Galatians 1:15)
- Called to be free (Galatians 5:13)
- Called to His eternal glory in Christ (I Peter 5:10).

Jesus called together His disciples and said, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:27-28

God’s call is powerful. Jesus calls Lazarus’ name and he jumps up out of his grave. If God calls you to be saved, He also calls you to serve. You can’t have one without the other. We’re drafted.

Now here is the mistake pastors make. We are convinced – and we convince you – that God is only calling you to serve in the church. This is partially true. The Lord calls His people to teach children the Bible, mentor youth, lead Growth Groups, welcome newcomers to worship and lead those worship services. The mistake comes when we stop at the church walls. Your calling starts here but it continues out there. The strength of a church is not measured by its seating capacity but by its sending capacity. Your family is part of your calling, your school work is your calling, your career is intended to be a sacred calling from God. Your community is the location of your calling.

What is God calling you to do? Do Good Deeds. Tell Good News. Do Good Deeds that help the poor, lost and lonely. Tell Good News that invites others to follow Jesus. Your calling is uniquely designed for you. When you find it, you know it’s right. You will know joy, you will know you are made for this, you will know this is why on earth you are here. When God drafts you into His service, you can be sure He will equip you with the four tools you will need to complete your mission.

First, the Lord gives you a **Mind to See those in Need**. Peter says “Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (I Peter 4:7). For most of our lives, our minds are filled with “me.” I think about *my* goals, *my* needs, *my* desires, *my* satisfaction. But you may remember, the first line in the book *The Purpose Driven Life* is “It’s not about you.”

If you want to discover why God put you here you must start with God not you. When I lay aside my agenda, I can see His will and the needs around me.

In 1973, two researchers, Darley and Batson, told students at Princeton Seminary to go across campus and deliver a sermon. As part of the experiment, they told the students they were late and needed to hurry. Along the route across campus, an actor played a coughing, suffering, homeless man. In their haste, 90% of the seminarians rushed past the man asking for help so they could get to class and preach the sermon. "Indeed, on several occasions, a seminary student literally stepped over the victim lying in the path!" What was the topic of the sermon? The Good Samaritan.<sup>2</sup> It's easy to criticize these students. But unless we clear our minds and control our selfishness through prayer, we also will walk right over the needs in front of us. Pray and ask God to open your mind to the people He wants you to serve.

Second, God equips us with a **Heart to Love those in Need**. Peter continues, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). When Peter says, "love each other deeply," he literally means, 'stretch yourself to love.' Don't just love those close to you. Reach out to those who may be difficult to love.

Mother Teresa once said she gives people more than food, shelter and medicine. Equally important are gifts from the heart—love and joy. The poor, she insists, deserve more than just service and dedication:

If our actions are just useful actions that give no joy to the people, our poor people would never be able to rise up to the call which we want them to hear, the call to come closer to God. We want to make them feel that they are loved.<sup>3</sup>

When we stretch to love others deeply, Peter says, it buries a multitude of sin. Jesus put our sins to death with love. So must we.

Third, God gives us **Gifts to Give those in Need**. Peter writes,

Offer hospitality without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. I Peter 4:9-10

Every Christian receives one or more spiritual gifts. You may have the gift of speaking, helping, teaching, hospitality, administering, writing, giving, caring or singing. The list goes on. You probably have more than one gift. This is a very gifted congregation. But your gifts are useless if you don't discover your gift, open it and use it where God is calling you to be. We want to help you find and use your gift.

One way to do this is to try some ministries that seem interesting. Please pull out your Connection Card on paper or the APP. Start a Growth Group or a microchurch with some friends. Stick around to help with the Recovery Service today. Run a food collection in your neighborhood. Help out with Habitat for Humanity. Assist the Interfaith Food Alliance or the Bucks County Opportunity Council. Serve food at Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. Sign up to be on the Welcome Team. Help with VBS.

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall Goldsmith, "Goal 1, Mission 0," *Fast Company* (August 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, "Mother Teresa," *Christian History* (Issue 65, Vol. 19, No. 1), p. 22

Trying some ministries is a good start, yet we want to help you go deeper. Every fall Woodside launches a churchwide focus on Spiritual Growth. This September will be a great time for each of us to discover our true purpose and calling from God. Our series will be called GPS: Finding Your Place. Just as you rely on Global Positioning Systems to navigate the roads, you'll use a biblical process which uncovers your Gifts – Passion – Story. Taken together, these three elements will reveal your unique God given purpose and calling. This September we ask every individual and every Growth Group to use GPS to find the place where God wants you to serve. God made you to be a masterpiece. Don't miss your calling.

Finally, God gives you **Strength to Meet those Needs**. Peter concludes,

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. I Peter 4:11

As you serve God, sooner or later, you will get tired, weary, cranky and exhausted. Why? Because people stink! We do. Sooner or later, someone will hurt you, cheat you, take advantage of you, demand too much of you and not say a single "Thank you." You and I cannot serve God on our own strength. Peter says we need to speak God's words and use God's strength when we say and do things. And then, when all is said and done, we give God the glory through Jesus Christ. When God drafts you, He will eventually lead you to a job you cannot possibly do on your own strength. Why? To teach you to rely on Him.

For Jeff, he reached his breaking point in ministry at five o'clock one Friday. He tells the story like this:

It had been a trying week at our Love & Action office. I was looking forward to having a quiet dinner with friends. Then the phone rang. "Jeff! It's Jimmy!" I heard a quivering voice say. Jimmy, who suffered from several AIDS-related illnesses, was one of our regular clients. "I'm really sick, Jeff. I've got a fever. Please help me." I was angry. After a 60-hour workweek, I didn't want to hear about Jimmy. But I promised to be right over. Still, during the drive, I complained to God about the inconvenience.

The moment I walked in the door, I could smell the vomit. Jimmy was on the sofa, shivering and in distress. I wiped his forehead, then got a bucket of soapy water to clean up the mess. I managed to maintain a facade of concern, even though I was raging inside. Jimmy's friend, Russ, who also had AIDS, came down the stairs. The odor made Russ sick, too. As I cleaned the carpet around Russ's chair, I was ready to explode inside. Then Russ startled me. "I understand! I understand!" "What, Russ?" Jimmy asked weakly. "I understand who Jesus is," Russ said through tears. "He's like Jeff!" Weeping, I hugged Russ and prayed with him. That night Russ trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior—a God who had used me to show his love in spite of myself.<sup>4</sup>

That God is calling your number.

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Collins, "It Happened on a Friday," *Christian Reader* (March/April 1998), Vol. 36, no. 2.