

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 7: LIFE CALLING AND THE POWER OF PURPOSE

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Leadership Lifestyle. The lessons examine the practical and spiritual requirements for those in Christian leadership. Being a leader is so much more than standing up in front of a group of people asking them to follow you! To be a great leader, one must maintain high standards in both public and private life. While every one of us struggles in many ways, a leader faces unique challenges. This module identifies some of these struggles and how to combat them, with practical advice from men and women who have experienced the trials and joys of following God's calling in leadership. Each lesson concludes with a Leader to Leader page. It features quotes from historical Christians, current Christian leaders, and people (not in leadership) who share their perspective on the topic.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 7: LIFE CALLING AND THE POWER OF PURPOSE

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson explores the general and specific callings from God, and how we can discern our purpose in the world.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Many of us in leadership have faced a moment when we wished God would just appear to us and give us a specific mission, as He did with Moses at the burning bush! But the event was recorded in the Bible because of its spectacular nature – not because it is the way God typically reveals His plans. Discerning God’s calling can be stressful and confusing, but at the same time exciting, and can give a powerful sense of purpose and direction. It may be several years after faithfully serving God that He will guide us into some specific task. It is important to seek God and His direction and look for the ways He directs and speaks to us. This call may come in many forms- and indeed there may be different calls at different times of life! This is all part of the great adventure of following Jesus Christ.

GETTING STARTED

1. What is God’s purpose for all people? Do you believe God has a specific purpose for you in addition to this general purpose?

2. What do you do when you want to know God’s will about something specific? Has this ever been a struggle in your life?



STUDY

❖ **WHAT IS A CALLING?** When Christians speak of having a calling, they are referring to being directed by God to serve in a specific ministry. Many individual Christians struggle with the question of what God is calling them to do with their lives, recognizing that we are all suited and designed for different types of work in God's Kingdom. While individuals may begin to question these things in young adulthood, the question is never really resolved, and that is a good thing! God's call on our lives may be different in different stages of life. Each of us is called by God to obey His general commands to everyone, and also His specific direction to us as individuals.

➤ **General Call:** The mission or purpose of every Christian is found in three general callings from God. They are:

- o **Salvation:** Each of us is called to respond to God's offer of salvation by repenting of our sins, believing in the work and person of Jesus Christ, and acknowledging Him as Lord of our life. Summarize what the following verses have to say about salvation: Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, John 3:16.

- o **Sanctification:** Each of us is called to obedience and holy living. God's commands are universal; none of us is exempt from them. This work of sanctification is only possible through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Summarize what the following verses say about sanctification: 2 Timothy 2:21, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, Hebrews 13:20-21.

- o **Service:** Each of us is called to serve God in some way. When opportunities present themselves, we should respond positively and obey Him. It may be a temporary opportunity rather than a life calling. If we are not serving in any way, we are not responding to the general call of God on our life. Summarize what the following verses tell us about service: James 1:22, Ephesians 6:7, Romans 12:11.

➤ **Specific Call:** God's specific call to us may involve the way we are to serve Him, and could include a full-time vocation. It is often separate from what we do to earn a living, though in some cases the two may overlap. A person could receive a call to be an evangelist but operate machinery by day. Or a person may be paid by a church to be their full-time pastor.



- o **Given by God, Confirmed by Others:** A specific calling on our life may come in different ways: a deep burden or passion, a constant spiritual pull, clear direction through His Word, a dream, or through the admonition of other Christians. These calls are usually confirmed by others who recognize that God has gifted and equipped the individual for the task.

- o **Many Vocations:** The word ‘vocation’ has come to mean work or mission given to us by God. There are many types of vocations. The farmer and the preacher may equally be called by God to their work. There are opportunities to serve God in many ways and in many places!
 - **Family:** marriage, parenthood and care of children within a family are callings of God.
 - **Workplace:** working in a regular job, and serving God through it, is a calling. We may be called to serve people as a medical doctor or teacher. Being a good employer or employee is also a calling of God.
 - **Culture:** finding our unique God-designed mission within our culture is a calling. We may be called to politics, to govern, to create culture through art or music, and in these ways bear witness to God in the world.
 - **Church:** we may also be called to serve God specifically in full-time or part-time ministry as a pastor, missionary, evangelist, or some other area of service. In many cases, Christians have a regular ‘day job’ in addition to their spiritual vocation. In other instances, people are paid for full-time ministry.

What are the ways you can serve God in each of these four areas?

Family	
Workplace	
Culture	
Church	

- o **Our Calling Glorifies God:** When we discern a call from God to a specific work or mission, we should take the necessary steps to follow His direction. It may take our whole lives to achieve what God has designed for us, but as we work out our calling and vocation, God is honoured and His work is accomplished.



Read each of the following verses and identify with a check mark whether that verse is referring to a general call for all believers, or a specific call for one individual.

Verse	Applies to All Believers	Applies to One Individual
Genesis 1:28		
Genesis 12:1		
Romans 12:2		
Romans 1:1		
Mark 12:30-31		
Titus 2:1		

❖ **GOD CALLS IMPERFECT PEOPLE FOR HIS PERFECT PLAN:** Sometimes we feel we are not ready to take on leadership, or to really effectively lead others to God. There may be flaws in our own character, and weaknesses in our life. But the interesting thing is that God doesn't use perfect people. God calls imperfect people who will rely on Him.

- **His Power is Made Perfect:** God does not always call those who are powerful, wealthy, influential and wise. He often uses the most ordinary and the weakest among us! It is God's power at work in us that accomplishes anything good! Otherwise, there is no witness to the world of God's power.

What does 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 say about the way God uses our weaknesses?

- This is excellent news for all of us! God does not have to wait until we are ready, fully trained, completely equipped and experienced! God will use us right where we are, and will give us His ability and power where we are lacking.
- God is carrying out His perfect plan in this world, and we are ALL called to join Him in it, each in our own unique way. We are not perfect, but we are part of His perfect plan which brings glory to Him.

How does it make you feel to know that you are not required to be perfect before God calls you to an important work? How has God already proved He will equip you for every good work?



- ❖ **God's Calling and Reassurance:** The Bible is full of stories of individuals called by God for a unique purpose, and equipped to carry out that task. Most were reluctant, a few were enthusiastic, but all who responded to God's call were imperfect people. There are three men who received God's calling, but who were hesitant at first.
- **Moses:** God heard the cries of His people in slavery, and called Moses to act on His behalf. When Moses was given his specific call, he already had a burden for his enslaved people and had acted to defend them. God had been working in the life of Moses all along to prepare him for this great work. Moses never felt that he was the right man for the job – but God used Him anyway.
 - **Invitation:** God appears to Moses in a burning bush and gets his attention. God invites Him to come closer ([Exodus 3:1-6](#)).
 - **Commission:** God tells Moses he will be sent to deliver his people from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt ([Exodus 3:10](#)).
 - **Objection:** Moses objects to God's plans and asks, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" Moses did not seek out this position, and was intimidated by the greatness of the task. Moses felt he was not a good enough speaker, and even begs God to send someone else instead! ([Exodus 3:11](#), [Exodus 4:10,13](#)).
 - **Reassurance:** God responds to the objection with reassurance and the offer of help. God reminds Moses that He will be with him, and that his brother Aaron will speak for him. God gives Moses signs ([Exodus 3:12](#), [Exodus 4:11-12, 16](#)).
 - **Acceptance:** Moses obeyed the call of God and returned to Egypt ([Exodus 4:20](#)).
 - **Many Others Needed Reassurance of their Call!** In the following Chart, notice a pattern of people who are called by God in the Bible! Just as Moses objected and received reassurance from God, Gideon, Zechariah and Simon Peter followed the same pattern.
 - **Gideon:** Gideon was the fifth judge over Israel at a time when God's people had abandoned the worship of God and were living in sin. As the people called out for God to rescue them, God used Gideon to answer their cries and deliver them from their enemies, the Midianites.
 - **Zechariah:** God had a plan for His faithful servant, Zechariah, to be the father of John the Baptist. Zechariah was an old man when this was revealed to him, but his years of faithful service to God had prepared him. Even though he was old, he was still useful in God's sight. It was an important calling to be the father of the forerunner of Jesus Christ!
 - **Simon Peter:** Jesus called His disciples to leave behind their old lives and follow Him. He required their complete trust, and demonstrated His power and authority to them. For three years He prepared them for the high calling of starting the Church and spreading the Gospel to the world!



- Read the verses below to see how God called these men of faith!

	Gideon	Zechariah	Simon Peter
Invitation	Judges 6:11-13	Luke 1:5-12	Luke 5:1-3
Commission	Judges 6:14	Luke 1:13-17	Luke 5:4
Objection	Judges 6:15	Luke 1:18	Luke 5:5
Reassurance	Judges 6:17-24	Luke 1:19-20	Luke 5:6-10
Acceptance	Judges 6:25-27	Luke 1:23-24	Luke 5:11

- Does all of this sound familiar to you? Have you ever been assigned a task that seems bigger than you are, or more than you could possibly handle?

- What can you learn about God’s call and enablement from these Biblical examples?

- What difference did it make for these men, knowing that God had called them to a specific task and that He would be with them?

❖ **CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WITH A CALLING:** When people know what their mission and purpose in life is, many things change. Nothing is meaningless anymore. When you have a call from God, you should become:

- **Servant Hearted:** You begin to see clearly the needs of people around you and the ways in which you can serve them.
- **Focused:** You begin to say 'yes' to what fulfills your purpose, and 'no' to the things that distract you. Focus allows you to make better choices in all areas of life.



- **Passionate:** You become a person who is passionate about the work of God and what He is doing in the world. You have energy and determination to complete the task.
- **Inspirational:** As you follow God's leading in your life, you inspire others to do the same. You attract others to serve as they observe God working through you.

Do you know anyone who fits this description? what are they doing, and why are they doing it?

❖ **How to Know your Calling:** One of the biggest questions people ask is how they can know God's calling! That is an excellent but sometimes complex question. A good starting point is to do what you can in serving while you wait for God's call to be clear.

➤ **What You Should Know:**

- **Know the Bible:** 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to study our Bible carefully in order to be adequately equipped to serve God. Time spent studying God's Word is never wasted. Knowing God's truth will prepare us to share His Word with others.
- **Know your Gifts:** Pay attention to the gifts others confirm in your life and practise using them. God's call will be in line with your gifts, not contrary to them.
- **Know the Needs Around You:** Pay attention to what needs to be done and watch for ways to do it. Get to work while you wait for your call!
- **Know what God is Doing in the World:** Read about missionaries, Christian workers, pastors and evangelists to increase your awareness of worldwide Christian ministries. Support others who are doing God's work both locally and in other countries.
- **Know your Feelings for Others:** What breaks your heart? What excites you? What do you deeply desire? What fills your thoughts and dreams? These are clues to the work that God wants you to accomplish. He has given you passions, pains and pleasures to point you to His calling.
- **Know the Limitations of your Life Circumstances:** At the present time, you may not be in a position to fulfill God's ultimate call. For example, if you are a young mother, your vocation is to raise your children, but it will not always be so. Consider your current ability to serve God, and also opportunities that will exist in the future.
- **Know the Opportunities Open to You:** Pay attention to opportunities to serve, learn, work with ministry teams, or receive training. If you are invited to serve somewhere, it may be God's call on your life. Pay attention.



What things from this list do you already practice knowing? What can you work on?

- **What You Can Do:** While you wait for your call, there are two things we can do: practise and pray.
 - **Practise:** God needs us to practise obedience, submission and faithfulness. These are the most important areas of preparation for serving!
 - **Pray:** Ask God to show you where you need to go, what you need to do, and how you can be part of the work He is doing in the world. Pray that you would have a burden for those who do not know Jesus, and pray that that you would have opportunities to use your skills and gifts. Pray that God would make His calling clear to you.

- **How to Discern the Call of God:** A specific calling from God may not come through a burning bush, a dream in the night or an angel visitation. A call from God usually has two parts:
 - **The Inward Call:** God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit, to give us longings, desires and particular holy passions. You will feel a growing commitment to some specific aspect of the work of God, and a compelling desire to be a part of it in some way.
 - **The External Call:** Often other believers recognize the gifts and abilities of an individual and invite them to a position of spiritual leadership or to a regular secular job. Both vocations have spiritual purpose.
 - Our calling will usually come through an invitation to serve in some way that matches the deep desires of our heart.
 - Our calling will usually be confirmed by fellow believers, and be met with encouragement from those who love us, and assurance from God.
 - Our calling will usually bring a sense of fulfillment and purpose, even if we are not successful as the world measures success.

- ❖ **The Power of Having a Purpose:** A purpose, calling, or vocation is the engine that drives our life. It provides us with meaning, satisfaction and direction. It connects us with the work that God is doing in this world, and every Christian should seek out his or her unique purpose. Even if we are unsure of what God has called us to, we should get involved in serving by taking the opportunities that present themselves to us. Sometimes God reveals His calling after we have served in a particular ministry. A God-centered purpose and calling will bear much fruit and bring deep joy.



SUMMARY

- ❖ When Christians speak of having a calling they are referring to being directed by God to serve in a specific ministry.
- ❖ Many Christians struggle with knowing what God is calling them to do with their lives, recognizing that we are all designed for different types of work in God's Kingdom.
- ❖ We are all called generally to be saved by God, be sanctified and to serve Him – but more specifically, a call to ministry work is given by God and confirmed by others.
- ❖ God's plans are perfect – but His people are not. God uses us in the imperfect state we are in – just as we are!
- ❖ Many biblical men and women struggled with God's call on their life – some even initially rejecting or running from it! But if God calls us to a task, He will equip us to do it.
- ❖ While we wait to know our calling from God, we can know many other things which will help us to discern this calling – such as God's Word, the gifts He has given us, the needs around us and the opportunities open to us.
- ❖ A call from God usually has two parts – an inward call which comes by the Holy Spirit in the form of longings, urges and holy passions. It is accompanied by a growing commitment to some aspect of the work of God. Secondly, is the external call where a group of God's people invite an individual into leadership.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Those who were called by God in the Bible were already working hard, not waiting for God's call! How has God used your past experiences to prepare you for the work He has called you to?

2. What has God called you to do? How do you know?



LEADER TO LEADER

QUOTATIONS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT ON THE TOPIC OF CALLING AND PURPOSE

“It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular. It is why and how he does it.”

– A.W. Tozer, Pastor and Writer

“People from my first home say I'm brave. They tell me I'm strong. They pat me on the back and say, 'Way to go. Good job.' But the truth is, I am not really very brave; I am not really very strong; and I am not doing anything spectacular. I am simply doing what God has called me to do as a person who follows Him. He said to feed His sheep and He said to care for 'the least of these,' so that's what I'm doing, with the help of a lot of people who make it possible and in the company of those who make my life worth living”

– Katie Davis, Missionary and Author

“All work, according to God's design, is service. Through work we enrich one another and become more and more interwoven. When Christians do “secular” work, they function as salt and light in the world. Farming and business, childcare and law, medicine and music—all these forms of work cultivate, care for, and sustain the created world that God made and loves. We are all ministers (priests) to the human community on God's behalf. Work is taking the raw material of creation and developing it for the sake of others. Musicians take the raw material of sound and bring the meaning of art into our lives. Farmers take the raw material of soil and seed and bring food into our lives. This means we are God's ministers in our work not only when we are witnessing or talking directly about Jesus, but when we are simply doing our work.”

– Tim Keller, Pastor and Writer

“When I was young, I wrote. I didn't think about whether it was my calling. It was just the passion of my heart. I would read and think about how I would have written something differently. I daydreamed about teaching others the Gospel. I saw the needs for people to know the truth, for a better story to be told, for words to point them in the right direction. At the same time I worried that I would never have anything important to do for God. When I was invited to write about God's Word, I didn't need to pause. It was a calling God had always placed inside me – I just didn't know it until the invitation came! Follow your holy passions, pay attention to what makes you feel alive, and watch for where you feel close to God's work in the world.”

– Adele, Christian Ministry Worker

“I believe that a personal call to ministry is discerned on two levels: the inner subjective sense of God's call and the external objective call of God's people. I believe, contrary to what I think is the generally held view, that the external objective call is the more important of the two, and that the inner subjective sense of calling should be considered the confirmation of the rightness of answering the external call rather than visa-versa. What I mean is that a person should wait to be actually invited by an actual group of people to become that group's spiritual leader --- and then should prayerfully consider whether God is directing his heart and mind to agree to accept.”

– Mike, Pastor

“In a sense, all followers of Jesus share the same “calling”: being a witness of Jesus Christ. My role in that calling began with my trying to be obedient to the Spirit's promptings as a student. When the opportunity to work with students as a vocational ministry was presented, I responded affirmatively to that “calling”. Everything since then has been a matter of following the prompting of the Spirit and trusting the counsel of peers and mentors as they assessed my strengths and gifting.”

– John, Christian Ministry Worker