

“Living Your Calling” (2 Cor 2:14-15)

Let me start with this question. “What makes you who you are?” What would be your answer?

This is a true story. A story of 8-year-old girl. At a Sunday school class, she was given a card, it read, “What you are is God’s gift to you and what you make of yourself is your gift to God.” She did not feel she was a gifted child. She thought everybody seemed smarter than her. She finished school and took a job as a fulltime secretary, typing and filing for a small company of 9 people working. There her carrier started. She learned business. Today she is one of recognizable leaders. She is Cary Fiolina, Former CEO of Hewlett-Packard; Opportunity International Global Board.

She said, it started with the most important lesson of all, which she got at the age of 8 years old. “What you are is God’s gift to you and what you make of yourself is your gift to God.” And she said, the truth is that everyone has potential. The truth is everyone has more potential than most of us realize. It is amazing what happens if human potential is unlocked, focused on worthy goals and a common purpose. Why people fail to fulfill their full potential? Some are afraid. Some never have a chance. Some, because of the lack of training or tool. Some lose faith. Some forget who they are.¹

2 Cor 2:14-15

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵ For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

Each and every one of us are sent to the different parts of society, carrying out God’ mission. Your working-place, office, school and home are your mission field. We are sent to those places as witnesses of Jesus, proof of salvation of the cross, bringing God’s presence, the fragrance of Jesus: peace, hope, joy and love. Through us, the aroma of Christ will spread.

If we forget who we are, we never fulfill our potential. If we don’t know who we are, it is impossible to live it out.

¹ GLS DVD 2015

Our theme for today is “Living Your Calling.”

There are three aspects of calling. One is the general call. It's for everybody, at any time as Jesus followers. The second is the specific personal call. God created each one of us unique. He gave us different life. He uses us differently. The third is the immediate responsibility. God leads us into a situation and wants to use us in a specific way in that moment.² We must respond to all three calls. Let's look at them one by one.

1. General Call

The first one is the general call. It's for everybody, at any time as Jesus followers: such as the aroma of Christ, or living as salt and light (Matt 5:13-14). We are sent to many different places to build a “loving community marked by justice and mercy, which reflects God's character and values.”³

It is just like adding flavor to food with seasoning. You cut vegetables and stir-fly it. If you put salt there, it has a salt flavor. If you put soy sauce, it has a soy sauce flavor. If you put chili, it has chili flavor. If you put chocolate, it has chocolate flavor. Now I got you. You will get the flavor of the seasoning you use, right?

In the same way, the place where we are will get the flavor of our being. Through us, the flavor of Jesus will season the place, the aroma of Christ will spread, the nature of God will start moving, and the value of the Bible will flow out. Through our lives, the kingdom of God is revealed.

Someone asked Jesus, “Which is the most important commandment?” Jesus answered, “It is to love God and to love your neighbors” (Matt 22:37-39). This single sentence shows how Jesus lived on the earth. The four gospels describe very well how Jesus loved God the Father, and people. His heart never left the Father. He always made the Father's thoughts his own thoughts. How he was delighted to be with the Father!

And he also loved the people. He poured out his love over his clumsy disciples in an amazing way. He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' dirty feet, one by one. He showed them the full extent of his love. Not only his disciples, but he also

² Gordon Smith, *Courage and Calling*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2011 (rev), pp.9-10

³ Timothy C. Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time*, Alban Institute (2008): p.187

loved others. He reached out to a man with leprosy and touched him. In those days, it was unthinkable to even come closer to people with leprosy. But Jesus did it and he even touched him. He loved people so much.

To love God and to love your neighbors. This is the general call. It's for all Jesus followers.

We cannot fulfill this call by our human effort. Actually we should not try this by our own strength. We must let Jesus flow out from us.

When we believed in Jesus, he came to our heart and started to live in us. Jesus who loves the Father lives in us. Jesus who loves our neighbors lives in us. We must let Jesus flow out from us. Then the aroma of Christ will spread out there. People around you may not recognize it, even sometimes may not appreciate it. It's okay. Because the aroma reaches to the heaven, and God loves it so much.

When we think about 'the general call', there is one thing we shouldn't forget. We may not want to think about it, but we cannot ignore this.

Philippians 1:29

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

We are also given the suffering because of Christ. This is also the general call. It's not optional for Jesus followers.

Jesus is the true light. He came to his own kingdom, but his own people didn't receive him (John 1:9-10). People loved darkness instead of light (John 3:19). People don't like the light because the light will expose their wrong doing.

Jesus lives in us. The true light will shine through us. And people hate the light. So the Bible says, "Do not be surprised, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13). We are also given the suffering because of Christ.

Not all Christians are pastors. But all Christians are the witness of resurrected Jesus (Acts 1:8). Not all Christians are professors of theology. But all Christians are the example of God's salvation (1 Pet 2:9). Not all Christians will be persecuted and martyred for their faith. Not all of us will be put into a situation where you have to choose Jesus or death. But all Christians are the agent of God's reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). These are the general call. It's for all Jesus

followers. Through us, the aroma of Christ will spread everywhere. It's for all Jesus followers, no matter where we are, and no matter what we are doing.

2. Specific Personal Call

The second is the specific personal call. God created each one of us unique. He gave us different life. He uses us differently. We will study about this in detail later. Let's look at it briefly here.

In John 21, we can see the conversation between resurrected Jesus and Peter. Jesus told Peter about what it will be like in his late years and indicated the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And he said to him, "Follow me!" Peter turned and saw one of the other disciples there. Most likely that was John.

John 21:21-22

When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" ²² Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

Jesus talked to Peter about his call. That is not someone else's call. No matter what someone else's call is like, it will not change Peter's call. That is Peter's call given by the Lord.

The second is the specific personal call. God created each one of us unique. He gave us different life. He uses us differently. We will study it more later.

3. Immediate Responsibility

The third is the immediate responsibility. God leads us into a situation and wants to use us in a specific way in that moment.

There was a disciple named Ananias in Damascus. The Lord spoke to him in vision, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul" (Acts 9:11).

This is a very good example of the immediate responsibility. If it's always as clear as this, we have no need to wonder whether it's our call for the moment or not. God calls a specific person to do a specific thing, in a specific situation.

We will fulfill the third sense of call as one of our responses to the first sense of call. This third sense of call includes multiple demands we face every day; our duties in the workplace, works in the house, our role in the family, activities in the community. And some of ministries in church can be also included in this third sense of call.

For example, if you are a parent, when your baby cries, it is your call to change your baby's diapers. In a specific situation, a specific person is called to do a specific thing. And you will do it as you love that person. Right? If you are a husband, when your wife cries in the kitchen, it is your call to run to her immediately and kill the snake. In a specific situation, a specific person is called to do a specific thing so that the love of God is revealed. Amen!

When you hear "We will fulfill the third sense of call as one of our responses to the first sense of call", probably you are wondering "How can I do that?" Yes, that is the point! When you have this question in your mind, you are about to respond to that call. "Right now I am doing this daily routine. How can I be the witness of resurrected Jesus?" You ask the Holy Spirit and He will guide you. "I am doing this work in this office. How can I be the example of God's salvation?" Ask the Holy Spirit and He will guide you. And say "Yes" to the Lord.

In 1994, I went to Indonesia for my first mission trip. We were there for about one week. I became very sick in the jungle of Kalimantan, I thought I would die there. Somehow I could return to Jakarta safely with others. We enjoyed our last meal and came to Jakarta airport. At the check-in counter so many people were crowding. This is Indonesia! I thought.

Our group leader used to be a missionary in Indonesia. He knew how to thrust himself into the line and reached the counter. What he found was: first of all, the whole system was down. Secondly, they couldn't provide seat for everyone because of over-booking. They are asking if anyone agrees to change their flight to the following day with other airlines. We decided not to change our flight, but wait to see if we can fly with the original flight. They said if it didn't work out, the airline company would provide our hotel and meal for the night. So I thought that would be fine.

Whoever got a seat was called from the counter. They did this process at random, without caring who travels with who, so it was a real chaos. I was

watching this from a little distance as if it were someone else's business. Then I noticed one lady was going back and forth there. She looked like a tourist. For quite a while, she was still going back and forth, from right to left, then left to right in the lobby.

One of the team members and I talked to her. We found that she came from Spain and she was traveling with her friend. When they arrived at the airport and tried to check in, she realized she didn't have her passport. Her friend got on the airplane as planned and left already. She had to go to the embassy and arrange her passport to be reissued. It was night already. Now she didn't know where to go, nor what to do. So she was just walking.

We sat down together, and talked for a while. And we asked if we can pray for her. Then, she helplessly nodded her yes. When we finished praying, she seemed to have calmed down. I gave her my English Bible. And she left there. Then, immediately we were called from the counter. Both of our seats were confirmed. Though we couldn't sit together, we could all go back to Japan with the same flight.

The third is the immediate responsibility. God calls a specific person to do a specific thing, in a specific situation. When we respond to it, we are practicing it fulfilling the first sense of calling, loving your God and loving your neighbors, reflecting God's character and values.

4. Following Your Vocation

Each of our lives in the society is God's chosen, designed, anointed means for glorifying God. The message of the gospel is revealed in our lives. Our lives, how we live every day is the ministry of reconciliation, bringing peace of God to the broken world.

The point is this: We will do it as we are truly who we are. That is, the second sense of calling.

Our life on this earth is a journey of responding to the second sense of call: to discover who we are, how God has created us and to develop our true selves with the ability and talent God has given us, with the desire God has placed

in our hearts and with how God has crafted our personalities.⁴

The second sense of calling leads us to follow our vocation.

Vocation is not about carrier or occupation. In his book “Courage and Calling” Gordon Smith says, “Vocation is about responding to the call of God to be in the world and to do work that reflects this call.”⁵ It is what we are called to be. It is to live who we are, how God designed us.

Our occupation is only for a period of time. It will change over time. Our role and position will change. We may move to different organization. We may change our occupation. And we will retire one day.

But, your vocation will never change, because it is who you are, how God created you. When we grow, we will surely change. But it doesn't mean I will become like someone else. I will be still I. This change never changes how God designed me. Actually when I grow, I will be more vividly who I really am. In this sense, vocation will never change. And there is no retirement for vocation, because “vocation is rooted in our fundamental identity.”⁶

Of course, our vocation can be expressed through our occupation. But for many, a job is just a means of supporting life and family. So occupation and vocation are two different things. Some people don't engage in formal occupations. But there is no one who has no vocation. There may be a time when you don't have occupation, but that doesn't mean you have lost your vocation. You may change your occupation, but your vocation won't change because it's how God designed you. And people who engage in the same occupation don't necessarily share in the same vocation, because vocation is who we are, who God has made us to be and how God has gifted us, graced us.

We will have different roles and responsibilities in different seasons in our lives. Someone may be a homemaker. And her role as a homemaker will end when her children has grown up. But she will continue to live her vocation, how God has made her, who she is called to be.

Vocation can be recognized as call, what God has called us to be and do, according to the way God designed us as a person. Each of us has something that we feel is the very reason for which we have been designed, created and

⁴ Gordon, p.70

⁵ Gordon, p.29

⁶ Gordon, p.73

redeemed.⁷

Let's think about this example. There was a natural disaster. We found people in the affected areas are short of water. So we wanted to bring them water. Now, here is the question. What came into your mind first? What is your first thought about responding to this situation? This is just an example, so please don't think so seriously.

- "Where can we buy the water? How can we bring them? How can we distribute them?"
- "Let's do some fund-raising."
- "Let's gather some volunteers and send them as a team."
- "Let's make a facebook group and put some photos and comments of the local people and volunteers. Let's make others know what is happening."
- "Are there any legal issues we need to clear in order to distribute the water? What kind of permission do we need, in order to do the work in the affected area?"
- "We must think about the volunteers' safety. How can we provide them food and the place to rest?"
- "How can we realize our plan and not just end with talking about it? How can we unite all these people who have different opinions?"
- "When will we go to distribute water? I'm ready to go any time!"

There may be more different ideas. Perhaps you could each relate to some of these ideas. Some of you have never thought about it before. There is a shortage of water. Let's bring some water. One situation and one mission. But what we each think about it, and how we each respond to it will be different from person to person. And how you looked at the situation, how you respond to it, what kind of concern you have, will express who you are. God made each one of us unique. We are all handmade by God. There aren't any two persons who are identical. We must discover who we are, how God designed us and develop our true selves.

Just now I have listed some of the thoughts as examples. They are all

⁷ Gordon, p.76

necessary. Each of these ideas are important. But none of them can complete this mission on its own. Each of us, who have different ideas, talents, abilities, characters, and personalities, must be joined together, and made alive in a community, then we will become blessing to one another in that community and through the community to other communities.

"A vocation is a charism, a gift of God to the church and to the world. Each vocation ... is God's gift. God graces the world through the talents, commitments and energies of each one, and this grace in and to the world is the grace of God manifested through the extraordinary diversity of calling – of the multiple ways people are called to make a difference with and for God in the world."⁸

5. Living Your Calling

Today we have studied the theme, "Living Your Calling." Here is the summary.

There are three aspects of calling. One is the general call. It's for everybody, at any time for Jesus followers. We are the aroma of Christ, the salt of the earth and the light of the world. All Christians are the witness of resurrected Jesus, the example of God's salvation, and the agent of God's reconciliation. And we are to suffer for Christ. These are the general call. It's for all Jesus followers.

In everyday lives, we respond to our immediate duties and responsibilities in each of our activities, in our work places, family, neighborhood, in respective situations. And God leads us into a situation and wants to use us in a specific way in that moment. They are the third sense of call, the immediate responsibility.

Our everyday lives are the series of responding to the third sense of call. You do it as who you are. That is, you are responding to the second sense of call.

The second sense of call is the specific personal call. God created each one of us unique. There are no two persons who are identical. There are no two lives that are exactly the same. God gave each one of us different personality, gift, ability, and passion. He gave us different life. He uses us differently.

Our life is a journey of discovering who we are, how God created us and developing our true selves. In that sense how we live is our response to the

⁸ Gordon, p.149

second sense of call. Every day, moment by moment, we will discover who we are more and more, recognizing how God created and designed us more and more. And we will develop our God-given personality, gift, ability and passion. We will grow more and more into a person God intended us to be. And we are able to respond to the third sense of call more effectively,⁹ and continue to live the first sense of call more abundantly.¹⁰

Lastly but not least we must remember that you are not doing God's mission alone. Each and every one of us is taking a part of it. It's like each of our lives is one piece of a huge stained-glass. Putting all together we can see a full picture, what God is doing here on the earth. What you are doing every day is valuable and meaningful as much as the full picture is.

Through us, the aroma of Christ will spread every corner of the society. To live is Christ, the hope of glory (Phi 1:21; Col 1:27).

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

1) Read Matt. 5:9-16, and take time to meditate on it. What kind of picture do you get? What does God speak to you? Is there any particular thing God is guiding or challenging you?

2) We have multiple demands we face every day. Do you have any struggle to do any of them? or feel unconformable to do? What is it? Why do you feel so? How does it help you if you look at it through the perspective of calling (1st sense)?

3) How would you describe yourself? What makes you unique? What ability and talent do you have? What desire can you see in you? And how would you develop yourself? What help do you need to do so? Whom would you ask for it?

⁹ When we follow our vocation, we can be freed from artificial standards of excellence, the burden of pleasing everyone, and the urgency and tyranny of time. Gordon, pp..129-132

¹⁰ When we follow our vocation, we are able to embrace authenticity, genuineness and truthfulness. Gordon, p.132