

CALLED
Pastor Joe Oakley
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We are in a sermon series called Chosen: Finding Your Identity in Christ. Our text is 1 Peter 2:9–10 which says:

You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people.

So far, we've seen that we are chosen by God, we are changed by God and we are complete in Christ.

The title of my sermon today is Called. We all have the same call and we all have different callings. We're going to explore that today. The first thing I want you to see is this:

1- You are called to be with God.

Before you do anything for God, you are simply called to be with God. I get this principle from when Jesus called His disciples.

By the way - the biblical word for call has three main meanings: To invite - To call by name - To give a name We see this with the disciples, because for some like Peter, not only did He call them to follow Him, but He actually changed their name! Matthew 4:19-22 says:

"Come, follow Me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.

The invitation to follow Christ is not an invitation to just add Him to your life! It is an invitation for Him to take over your life. These verses show that these disciples left their careers and their families behind to answer the call to follow Christ. This is not saying that they never worked again or never had anything to do with family again. It just means that they put Christ first in their lives! Jesus said in Matthew 10:37-39

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take His cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses His life for My sake will find it.

The call to follow Christ is the call to die to yourself! It's a call to take up your cross daily. It's a call to seek His kingdom and righteousness first! It's the call to love Jesus more than anything or anyone else in your life! It's a call to a relationship.

When Jesus called His disciples, what did He call them to do? I love the Wuest Translation of Mark 3:14-15 which says:

He appointed twelve in order that they might constantly be with Him, and in order that He might send them forth as ambassadors with credentials, representing Him, to accomplish a certain task, that of making a proclamation with such formality, gravity, and authority as must be heeded and obeyed, being equipped with delegated authority to be casting out demons.

That's powerful! He called His disciples and gave them credentials and authority to heal sicknesses and cast out demons. By the way – we have that same authority today as His ambassadors! We have credentials and authority to represent Him and to do what He would do: heal people and set them free!

But here's the amazing thing: many scholars say it was over a year before Jesus actually sent them out to do anything. What were they doing? Being with Him. He appointed twelve that they might constantly be with Him! Getting to know Him. Watching Him produce results like none seen before!

Then He sent them out, and when they came back He questioned them and corrected them and encouraged them and rejoiced with them! The point is that He spent time pouring Himself into them. And that transformed them from the inside out!

Your first call from God is the call to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. To repent of your sins and place your faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. And that call to follow Him is the call to be with Him. To spend time with Him and get to know Him. This is necessary so that we don't misrepresent Him! We should be with Him so much that we know what He would do in any situation. That's what being with Jesus did for the disciples. At first, instead of representing Him – they misrepresented Him!

James and John wanted to call down fire on a village that rejected Jesus, but Jesus said that was not the spirit He operated in.

The disciples wanted to send away a woman who was seeking healing for her daughter, but Jesus healed her anyway.

The disciples wanted to send the hungry multitudes away, but Jesus wanted to feed them.

The disciples rebuked people who brought children to Jesus to be blessed – but Jesus rebuked the disciples and blessed the children.

It was only after being with Jesus for years that the disciples started to understand how to properly represent Him. Likewise, we need to be with Jesus so that we properly represent Him. We don't need to misrepresent Him by calling down fire on someone we disagree with on Facebook! We should be with Him so that we become like Him!

That's what happened to the disciples. They were with Him so much that it changed them so much that other people could tell! In Acts 3, Peter and John healed a lame man. That drew a crowd and they began to preach. By the way – miracles give us the opportunity to preach Jesus!

The religious authorities were upset by this, so they arrested Peter and John. They asked them who or what gave them the power to heal. Their response was so amazing that Acts 4:13-14 says:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

I guess not! But what a testimony that must have been for Peter and John. They received the ultimate compliment – that they had been with Jesus. And it's the same for us! When our thoughts and words and actions become Christlike, people will realize that we have been with Jesus!

Always remember – before you are called to do anything for Christ – you are called to be with Him!

2- You are called to Minister to God

We all have the same call to minister as priests unto the Lord. 1 Peter 2:9 says:

You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

We are royal priests. What do priests do? They minister to the Lord and they minister to people... in that order! Our first priority as priests is to minister to the Lord! Deuteronomy 10:8 tells us what priests did in the Old Testament:

At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to pronounce blessings in His name.

That's our priorities: minister to the Lord and then to people. But how do we minister to the Lord? Well – what did priests do in Bible times? They offered sacrifices. What sacrifices can we offer? Hebrews 13:15-16 says:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

We can offer up sacrifices of praise – of doing good – and giving. We should do this as a ministry to the Lord. But our ministry to the Lord must come before ministry to people! Some people get so caught up ministering to the house of the Lord that they forget to minister to the Lord of the house! That has disastrous results!

In Ezekiel 44, Ezekiel had a vision of God's glory filling the temple. Out of the glory – God gave him a prophetic word for the people and the priests. Verses 10-16 say:

The Levites who went far from me when Israel went astray and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin.

Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, as gatekeepers of the house and ministers of the house; they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.

But they shall not come near Me to minister to Me as priest, nor come near any of My holy things, nor into the Most Holy Place; but they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed.

But the priests, who are Levites and descendants of Zadok and who faithfully carried out the duties of My sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from Me, are to come near to minister before Me, declares the Sovereign Lord. They alone are to enter My sanctuary; they alone are to come near My table to minister before Me and perform My service.

Wow! God told the disobedient priests that their punishment was that they could only minister to people, not the Lord! For those who know what it means to minister to the Lord, this is the absolute worst punishment! Don't be satisfied by just ministering to people in the name of the Lord! Be satisfied only by ministering to the Lord first!

This is serious to God! This is so important to Him that Jesus said He is actively seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth! Our first priority as priests of God is to stay in a place of worship! Stay in the presence of God! As we stay in that calling to minister to the Lord, then and only then...

3- You are called to minister for God

This is how ministry happened in the early church. Acts 13:1-3 says:

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers... As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

As the church gets its priorities right by being with God and ministering to Him first – THEN he will begin to show us the work He has called us to do! We all have a ministry! First to the Lord together – and then to the individual ministries He calls us to.

How do we discover our calling? The same way Paul and Barnabas did. They were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. They were in a church where ministry to God was first and where teaching ministry and prophetic ministry flowed together. The 5-fold ministry was in operation to equip the saints for ministry. The church recognized their gifts and calling. As they ministered to God and fasted, they heard the call of the Lord.

Grace Fellowship Church wants to follow that pattern!

We want to put ministry to the Lord first!

We want to touch heaven – then change earth.

We want the 5-fold ministry to equip the saints for ministry.

We want to pray and fast and hear from God.

And we want to lay hands on people to send them out to fulfill their call.

I want to give you some practical help in discovering your call.

Nehemiah was a Jew who lived in Babylon around 500 BC. He was the cupbearer to the king of Babylon – which meant he tasted the king's food and drink to be sure it wasn't poisoned. One day his brother returned from Jerusalem and told Nehemiah about the sad state of his homeland. He told him in Nehemiah 1:3

Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.

Verse 4 says:

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah then prayed a prayer of repentance for the sins of Israel. He reminded the Lord of His promise to restore His people to the land when they repented. Then in verse 11 Nehemiah prayed

"Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

God did give Nehemiah favor with the king. Not only did he give him time off to go to Jerusalem to repair the walls, but he gave Nehemiah letters for safe passage, materials to rebuild the city and an army for protection. And under Nehemiah's leadership, the walls of Jerusalem – which had been in ruins for over 100 years – were rebuilt in 52 days!

From this incredible story we see principles for discovering our call.

1- It begins with a burden

A burden is something that weighs on you - something that moves you to tears like Nehemiah was moved by the state of his homeland.

You know you have a burden when you say, "This is bad and somebody ought to do something about it." Many times – you are that somebody! But – you need to do what Nehemiah did.

2- Pray to know God's will

A need is not necessarily a call. We are all surrounded by needs – but we need to hear from God about which ones He wants us to meet.

3- When you have a burden and you know it's God's will for you to do something about it – then do something about it!

Don't just run out and start doing things without counsel or planning! Getting counsel and making plans are part of doing something!

So – we see from the life of Nehemiah that God calls people to repair broken situations and broken people by giving them a burden.

What's your calling in life? What does God want you to do for His kingdom? Sometimes your career and your calling are the same. They are the same for me as a pastor - but sometimes they are different. That's true for most members of the body of Christ. We all have a calling from God and we need to discover it. Romans 8:28 is my favorite verse in the Bible.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.

We tend to only quote part of it. We'll say – God works all things out for our good... and that's true. But true for whom? True for those who love God AND who are called according to His purpose. There is a general call for every Christian. There is the call to salvation and the call to ministry. This is also a specific call and purpose for each individual. The Amplified version says called according to *(His) design and purpose*.

I'm probably going to mess up somebody's doctrine today- But the way I read this verse – if you're not living for God in the way He called, designed and purposed for you – He is not obligated to work out things for your good!

If you're called to preach and you go into business instead – God's not obligated to bless that business! If you're called into business and you decide to preach instead – God's not obligated to bless your preaching!

That's why it's so important to know God's plan for our lives. So - how do you know what you are called to do? God calls by placing burdens and desires in our heart, placing gifts and talents in our lives, by arranging circumstances and ordering our steps.

Also – past experiences play a big part in our calling. Some of us have gone through things that just don't make sense, but please understand that there is a purpose to your past! 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says:

God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

All of us have been hurt in life.

All of us have made messes in life – but God can turn a mess into a message!

You might not think God can use you because of your past!

NONSENSE!

God called a murderer named Moses to lead His people out of slavery!

God called a prostitute named Rahab to help His people take the Promised Land!

God called an adulterer named David to be the King of Israel!

God called a suicidally-depressed prophet named Elijah to do great miracles.

God called a man with a huge inferiority complex named Gideon into a general who led God's army to victory!

God called a Samaritan woman with multiple failed marriages into an evangelist who led her whole town to Jesus!

And God is doing the same thing today!

God calls former addicts to help other addicts get set free!

God calls survivors of abuse to help others overcome their shame!

God calls former prisoners to help others stay out of prison.

God calls those who dug themselves out of a financial mess to help others learn how to get out of debt.

God calls those who've been through severe marriage and family crises to help other families in trouble!

God is calling you today to take what He's given you – add it to what you've been through – and go forth and minister to the Lord and people!