

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

the CALLING

For from Him and through Him and to Him are
all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:36

It is a dependable axiom that every follower of Christ begins that momentous relationship filled with erroneous assumptions about God the Father, about Christ, about His church. And why not; this world is filled to overflowing with well-cultivated fallacies and lies about God, His written word, and His incredible economy of salvation for man through His Son. After all, anyone who has been living in a swamp will surely emerge from its fetid environs with stinking slime still clinging tenaciously to his ankles.

And, of course, no one can know it all from the start. We learn of and grow in God over time, as we walk with Him; that is called *progressive sanctification*, and without it every believer would enter heaven as ignorant of God as when he first entered into faith.

Perhaps the most prevalent misconception is that placing one's trust in Christ Jesus—"accepting Christ," in the vernacular—is little more than obtaining a "Get out of Jail Free" card that will grant entrance through the Pearly Gates and reserve residence in heaven for all eternity. (We would need at least all the fingers on a hand to tic off the incorrect assumptions in just that one sentence.) Being a Christian means far more than just avoiding hell; being a follower of Christ means having an intimate, ongoing, fruitful relationship with Him.

Even before the individual's faith, essential to that relationship is God's *call* of the individual.

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

And similar to sanctification, there is a second kind of call. In addition to the initial call, every believer is called by God to *do* something in His kingdom, to be useful and fruitful. To this end the Lord graciously gives every believer a gift—at least one, sometimes several; a talent, an ability, a passion—which will equip the believer for his specific *calling*.

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Life in Christ is far, far more than just salvation from hell and a foot in the door of heaven. Life in Christ is a rich, multifaceted, glorious tapestry of joy and usefulness. It is rewarding, it is fulfilling.

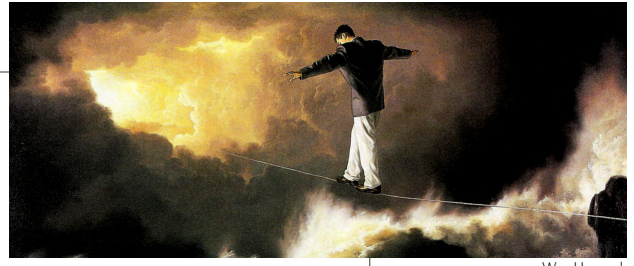
It is obedience. ●

Issue #807, July 2017.

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Staying the Course



Wes Hempel

God, through His calling, gives every believer a purpose to his living. His calling, along with our obedience to it, comprise the answer to the age-old questions, “What is all this for? What is the meaning of life? Why am I here?” Because of our answer to His call, we will one day stand before Him and, to our unbounded joy, be able to say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”



The writer of Ecclesiastes, probably King Solomon, had by his later years lost that purpose, lost sight of his calling. He had started well; in his youth the Lord had honored his request for wisdom over wealth by granting him both. Solomon indeed became the wealthiest and wisest man on earth, and in his devotion to the Lord had built Jerusalem’s first permanent temple to Yahweh.

By the time of his old age, however, Solomon had abandoned his calling. The younger man who had dedicated the temple with

“O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, who have kept with Your servant, my father David, that which You have promised him; indeed, You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it is this day.”

1 Kings 8:23-24

had, as an old man, lost his way. By then Solomon’s many foreign wives had turned him away from Yahweh to their detestable gods, and pagan high places and altars were scattered throughout Israel.

So it is understandable that, as a weary and dispirited old man he opens the philosophical writings we know as the book of Ecclesiastes with the depressing lament,

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher,

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

What advantage does man have in all his work
Which he does under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

Here is the sad portrait of someone who had walked

away from his calling, walked away from his God-given purpose in life. As a result he left this life discouraged and broken, the wisest man on earth befuddled and morose because he had been outsmarted by indulgence.



Most worldly philosophers declare that the meaning of life is to be found within, in an examination of and exulting in self, as in that tired old valedictory chestnut, “Invictus,” by William Ernest Henley.

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

King Solomon is the poster child for the idiocy of that sentiment. It was only when he began believing that he was the master of his own fate, when he began listening more to himself than to his Lord, that his life began to crumble into dust.

Whereas Solomon had the advantage of growing into his call naturally, taught a love for the Lord by his father David, and having every advantage to not just begin but end well, when Christ Jesus called Saul of Tarsus the man was dedicated body and soul to violently expunging every adherent to the Way (the early church).

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:1-2

Saul was against anyone believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Even so, in contrast to the profligate King Solomon, the apostle Paul (Saul's Roman name) is the picture of someone who received his call, embraced it, and stuck with it to the end. Through innumerable trials, stoning, shipwreck and imprisonment the apostle remained true to his call—to preach the good news of Christ, first to the Jews, then to Gentiles.

Jesus Christ—personally, verbally—called Paul. Was it enough that the former persecutor of Christians was converted? Was it enough that he was chosen by Christ for salvation? No, the Lord had far more in mind; He had a *calling* in mind for the new apostle. After the Damascus Road event, Jesus sent a reluctant Ananias to deliver to Paul his working orders.

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before

the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Acts 9:15-16

In his final admonition to his spiritual son, Timothy, in his last known letter written shortly before his execution, Paul told him to stay the course, to remain true to his calling.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction... But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

2 Timothy 4:1-2, 5

And God says the same to each of us: fulfill your ministry. In Christ, God offers every believer a sanctified—and sanctifying—pathway of purpose: a calling. Every Christian is called by God for something, and only in accepting and fulfilling that calling will we find purpose and meaning in this temporal life. ●

*Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless, sea;
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow Me!"*

*Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love Me more!"*

*In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love Me more than these!"*

*Jesus calls us! By Thy mercies,
Savior may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all.*

Cecil F. Alexander

It's Not About Us

The idea of God calling some individuals to Himself makes not a few people uncomfortable, because if it is true that He singles out some to call, then it only follows that He singles out others *not* to call. God's initial call of individuals is closely related to His predestining of individuals—and the topic of predestination *really* makes people uncomfortable. But, like it or not, Scripture is quite clear on the subject.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Romans 8:28-30

Neither predestination or God's call are disconcerting when one embraces the truth that, at root, none of this is about us, but every part of His salvation economy for man is of and for Him. It is all of grace; we do not merit it, we do not deserve it, we are not owed it. Everything—*everything*—emanates from a gracious, giving God. Beyond that, even our saving faith comes from Him, as do the works we do in His name.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:4-10

What liberating encouragement we have in the realization that our God has done all this for us! We

are called by Someone who loved us before time began. We are called by Someone who never abandons us. We are called by Someone who loved us enough to sacrifice His own Son to guarantee our eternity with Him.



The most obvious encumbrance to embracing the heavenly perspective on this is self. Every one of us is born with the predilection for placing ourselves first; it cuts against our birthright—not to mention the insidious vapors of the “me first” society in which we must dwell—to imagine that we are not at the center of God's plan. But that is essential to understanding our place in His kingdom, in His universe.

When I joined the U.S. Navy in 1969 there was an active military draft in place. This meant that young men were routinely called up to serve. If we set aside the fact that many of those young men did not particularly *want* to be called up—especially during those anti-war years of the sixties and seventies—it wasn't such a bad deal. The government calling you supplied everything necessary: uniforms, room and board, all medical and dental coverage, discounted groceries and gasoline. If you got married, the wife and family were automatically folded into the coverage.

Yes, you were owned, but you were taken care of.

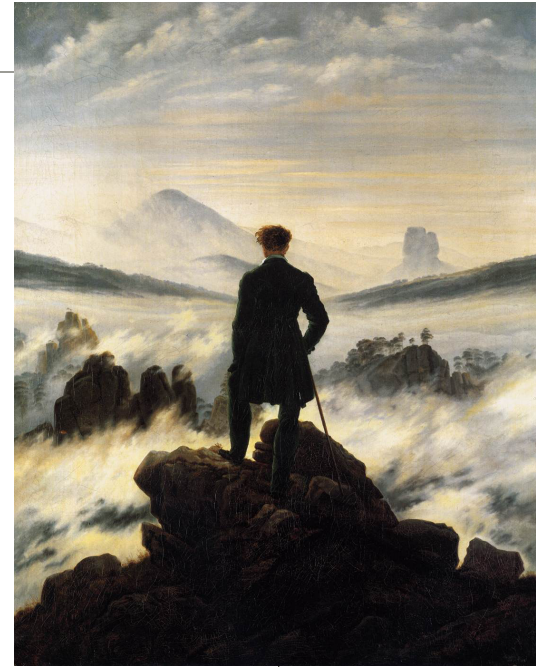
Even though your essential needs were supplied, however, that did not mean that the military existed for you. You existed for the military, but even more to the point, you existed for your *country*. You were kept healthy and well-fed to serve your country in the manner of its choosing.

Christians may be under the impression they have volunteered for the Lord's “army,” but in truth they were conscripted. It was His idea, from the beginning.

“Who has performed and accomplished it,
Calling forth the generations from the beginning?

‘I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.”

Isaiah 41:4



David Caspar

And just as with military conscription, the ultimate purpose behind the choosing is not for the benefit of the individual, but for the benefit of the One who has done the choosing. The Lord God will be glorified on earth, and to this end He calls out some to stand for Him, to live for Him, to declare His name among the nations. ●

Thus says God the LORD,
Who created the heavens and stretched them
out,
Who spread out the earth and its offspring,
Who gives breath to the people on it
And spirit to those who walk in it,

"I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness,
I will also hold You by the hand and watch over
You,
And I will appoint You as a covenant to the
people,
As a light to the nations,
To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the dungeon
And those who dwell in darkness from the
prison.
I am the LORD, that is My name;
I will not give My glory to another,
Nor My praise to graven images."

Isaiah 42:5-8

Gifts

If we were to liken our calling to an iceberg, our initial call by God would be the small visible part at the top, and our calling to serve Him in a particular manner, with specific gifts, would be the huge bulk of the iceberg hidden beneath the surface. Or perhaps a more apt metaphor would be to liken our initial call to our physical birth, and our calling to serve God to the rest of our earthly life. That is, our initial call just gets us started, while our specific calling is what we do with it from then on. Put succinctly, we are called so that we can be given and use our calling.



There is no earthly illustration for the manner in which the Lord God equips each individual Christian for the work to which he or she is called.

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

1 Peter 4:10

First, this gift (*charisma*) is absolutely free. We do not ask for it, we do not pay for it, nor do we earn it. It is God's free gift. Second, it is supernatural. This gift is part of the package that comes with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus, it is a spiritual gift, not of this earth, and is part of the change that has and will be taking place in our life. It is all of God; it is all of grace (*charis*).

But, still, it is not about us. This gift is for our use, but not for our purpose. It is for God's purpose. This

spiritual gift from God is part of His investment, in and through each of us, to glorify Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:11

Our spiritual gifts—most believers are given more than one—comprise the raw material with which we fulfill our calling. Our gifts are our tools for the job before us. Just as a ditch digger needs a shovel, an electrician needs a screwdriver, and a carpenter needs a hammer, these gifts are essential; without them we would only be serving ourselves, in the power of the flesh, rather than in the power of the Spirit.



What are these spiritual gifts? How do we identify them? And how do we know which ones we have been given? We have the answers to these questions in God's word (emphasis added).

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according

to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if **prophecy**, according to the proportion of his faith; if **service**, in his serving; or he who **teaches**, in his teaching; or he who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; he who **gives**, with liberality; he who **leads**, with diligence; he who **shows mercy**, with cheerfulness.

Romans 12:4-8

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given **the word of wisdom** through the Spirit, and to another **the word of knowledge** according to the same Spirit; to another **faith** by the same Spirit, and to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, and to another **the effecting of miracles**, and to another **prophecy**, and to another **the distinguishing of spirits**, to another **various kinds of tongues**, and to another **the interpretation**

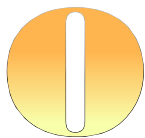
of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, then **miracles**, then **gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues**. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

A Call to Submission



Our calling by and for God does not take place during a formal, one-time ceremony; it is not part of our induction into some mystical, secretive society. The manner in which He calls one individual may be very different from how he calls others. It may be a dramatic, even supernatural annunciation that changes a life forever, or it may feel like just part of the natural ebb and flow of a person finding his way in the world. One person may be assured of his call going in, while another realizes it only later, after it has been part of his life for a while.

We all have heard, from time to time, of this man or that being “called” to ministry, which we take to mean that he has received—felt, interpreted, perceived—from God a specific order to give himself to ministry of one sort or another. We’re comfortable with that; we have come to expect that for “men of the cloth.”

But we are less comfortable with the idea that every believer has been similarly called.

The world's system, if it deigns to subscribe to this at all, would have us believe that God seeks out talented individuals, then enlists them for His purpose. The record shows that this is not the case; historically God has called weak, even broken vessels into which to pour His wisdom, His knowledge, His graces, His glory.

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing great-



Norman Rockwell

ness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

2 Corinthians 4:5-7

Every believer is called, and some will plan a pathway of service on their own, but the Lord God remains in control. For the service of *our* choosing our earth-bound talents neither commend us to God or disqualify us from His service. Our prior experience will not necessarily endorse us, and our past ill-gotten deeds will not necessarily prevent His agreement with us. He can reject the choice of the most gifted, dynamic performer, and He can sanction the chosen path of one who had been the filthiest sinner—because it is all of *Him*. He is the one calling the shots.

God, in times past, has called
a pagan sheep-herder from Ur,
a cheat and a liar,
a Jericho prostitute,
an adulterer and murderer,
uneducated fishermen,
a hated tax collector,
a hate-filled persecutor of Christians.

Just as with salvation itself, the Lord God can reshape, remake the “vilest offender” into someone beautiful and useful in His kingdom through His calling.

*O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.*

*Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;*

*But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.*

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He has done.*
Fanny Crosby

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At its most fundamental root, God’s calling for each individual is a call to submission. It is an acceptance of His sovereign lordship over our lives.

If you are unsure of your calling, a good starting point is to pore over God’s list of spiritual gifts to determine with which of them He has graced you. No matter who or what you are, if you belong to Christ, you will find yourself there—perhaps not to a dramatic, earth-shaking degree, but you will be there. You may not be the next Billy Graham, but you may be gifted to quietly and kindly share gospel truth with your neighbors over the back fence. You may not be able to speak in tongues, but you may be able to help little children understand God. You may not be able to teach Sunday School, but you may be able to balance and keep the church’s finances.

Then submit yourself before the throne of God. *Lord You have graciously entrusted this gift to me. Now use me as You see fit; use me for Your glory, and for the building up of Your church.*

Then watch Him go to work in and through your life. ●


God called Jesus Christ to what seemed absolute disaster. And Jesus Christ called His disciples to see Him put to death, leading every one of them to the place where their hearts were broken. His life was an absolute failure from every standpoint except God’s. But what seemed to be a failure from man’s standpoint was a triumph from God’s standpoint, because God’s purpose is never the same as man’s purpose.

The call of God can never be understood absolutely or explained externally; it is a call that can only be perceived and understood internally by our true inner-nature. What God calls us to cannot be definitely stated, because His call is simply to be His friend to accomplish His own purposes. Our real test is truly believing

that God knows what He desires. The things that happen do not happen by chance—they happen entirely by the decree of God. God is sovereignly working out His own purposes.

If we are in fellowship and oneness with God and recognize that He is taking us into His purposes, then we will no longer strive to find out what His purposes are. As we grow in the Christian life, it becomes simpler to us, because we are less inclined to say, “I wonder why God allowed this or that?” And we begin to see that the compelling purpose of God lies behind everything in life, and that God is divinely shaping us into oneness with that purpose.

Oswald Chambers



Life in Christ is not a static condition. It is immeasurably more than just obtaining a foot in the doorway of heaven, far more than simply gaining a more agreeable eternal life.

Life in Christ is living with Him, listening to Him, obeying Him, loving Him. It is submitting to His authority in every aspect of one's earthly existence. In that sense, every follower of Christ has the same calling: to submit to His lordship.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:1-7

Our calling, no matter how public and dramatic or private and seemingly insignificant, comprises both a burden and a gift from above. It is the Lord's affirmation that we belong to Him, and that He wants us for a specific purpose in His economy. With that sobering responsibility comes the joy of His presence, His nurturing and, not least, a sense of integral continuity with His life and His kingdom.

Thus our calling is a daily reaffirmation of His grace, and His love for us. ●