

CHAPTER 1

CALLING IN CONTEXT

Building a Foundation of Discipleship

DON'T START HERE! While this may be a good place to begin this book, it's not really a great point to start helping Millennials engage their calling. We firmly believe and have seen that any discussion on calling must take place in the larger context of discipleship.

In fact, if you tried to sketch out a linear progression of Jesus' disciples' journey from their first encounter with Jesus to their death/martyrdom, calling comes into play at the point there is some spiritual maturity.

The disciples clearly didn't understand what Jesus was calling them to do with their lives until after His death. They spent time confused, questioning Jesus, denying Jesus and squabbling. At some point in their maturation process, it clicked. They still swayed off the path from time to time, but as they continued to surrender, they marched on toward the accomplishment of their calling.

Or, it may be that the search for one's calling (many call it "purpose") is exactly what God uses to prepare someone's

heart to enter into a relationship with Christ. Our experience has shown us that *wherever* an individual of any age begins their journey to discover, engage and live out their primary and secondary callings, they must be surrounded by discipleship.

This is a cornerstone understanding that's essential to helping guide Millennials in their calling journey. In any case, whether calling comes later in the maturation process, or God uses calling to get a hold of our lives, we can always work to "multiply while maturing."

A good friend recently shared that valuable idea with me. We all need a level of maturity so that we don't do harm while at the same time releasing hungry disciples to get busy doing God's work. As a discipler, I know that if I am walking in this tension, I am doing my job--it's a good tension.

Let's look at the two callings and a unique framework for both.

Our Primary and Unique Callings

In his research for his book, *More: Find Your Personal Calling and Live Life to the Fullest Measure*, author Todd Wilson found that we all have a two-part calling: a general or primary calling common to all disciples; and a personal or secondary calling that's unique to each of us.⁵

We all share the same primary or general calling as His Church—to be disciples who make disciples wherever we are and wherever we go. Scripture tells us our primary calling is to be disciples who carry the fullness of Jesus into every crack and cranny of society. Matthew's gospel gives us the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

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baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Disciples being made in all nations is God’s plan A. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul paints a picture of what happens when that plan is being rolled out ... the fullness of Jesus fills everything: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Each of us also has a secondary calling but unlike our primary calling, our secondary or personal calling is unique to each one of us. Wilson describes our primary and personal callings:

“Our general or primary calling is to be disciples who make disciples where we are! This element of calling is the fullness of Jesus flowing in us and through us to others.

“When the Bible refers to “calling,” it is most often this primary or general calling. Our general calling is common to that of all Followers of Jesus Christ.”⁶

The personal or unique calling, Wilson writes, “equips us to play a unique part in accomplishing God’s mission in our community.”⁷

When discipling Millennials in the area of calling, this idea of two different types of calling is extremely valuable. We are all part of the Body of Christ, a family. God has designed each member of His family with a set of common expectations laid out in the New Testament.

Common to all believers is the command to make disciples, take care of orphans and widows, forgive those

that have sinned against you, etc. As a part of a local body of believers, whatever that expression looks like, we all have a part to play in simply helping that family function and thrive.

Sometimes the local body needs us to rock babies, lead small groups, park cars and other activities that don't necessarily light our fires but are necessary for the benefit of the whole.

Sometimes these opportunities align with our unique calling, but most of these opportunities to serve fall under the umbrella of volunteerism. Again, we all need to volunteer. We all need to pull our weight in the family of God.

But ... and this is a big but. Leaders, if you start and end the conversation around calling with volunteerism, or common calling, you are doing a disservice to those you are discipling and to the Kingdom of God. As Millennials are actively working to feel secure in their unique reason for being, they need to experience Ephesians 2:10 happening in their lives:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10, ESV).

The very notion of “workmanship” connotes notions of being “unique” and “special,” designed by the master craftsman. The word “beforehand” tells us that God has prepared these works since the beginning of time and eternity. God has been actively preparing the unique “good works” for his Millennial masterpieces to “walk” into.

This is a generation that needs to experience the alignment between who they are, who they were created to be, and what their Creator designed them to do.

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Gordon Smith, president of Ambrose University writes in *Courage and Calling*:

“First, there is the call to be a Christian ... Second, for each individual there is a specific call— a defining purpose or mission, a reason for being. Every individual is called of God to respond through service in the world. Each person has a unique calling in this second sense. We cannot understand this second meaning of call except in the light of the first.⁸

Be-Do-Go

We can understand how these callings play out in our lives with what Wilson calls the Be-Do-Go framework:

- who are you created to BE
- what are you uniquely made to DO
- where you fit and GO.

Our secondary calling is our unique Ephesians 2:10 distinctive that makes each individual different and gives each of us a unique role in God’s bigger plan.

In my (Derek) experience, the very revelation of this common and unique calling is freedom- producing. The idea of common calling allows me to relax into volunteer positions even when they aren’t exhilarating. At the same time, the idea of having a unique calling keeps me searching the heart of God and exploring the depths of my of own soul. Then, I have an explanation for when I get that feeling that I am putting my all into a work that was ... prepared beforehand ... since the beginning of time.

That search offers an explanation for when I sense that I'm putting my all into a work that was ... prepared beforehand for me ... since the beginning of time. As leaders, it's up to us to share this freeing truth with Millennials. This is a generation that needs to experience the alignment between who they are, what they were created to do, and where they belong.

When Millennials Skip Over Their Primary Calling

Years ago, author, entrepreneur and philanthropist Bob Buford told his Bob, Inc. team (what he lovingly called his small group of advisors, including Doug Slaybaugh, Todd Wilson and me) about a conversation he once had with Pastor Rick Warren. The details of the conversation are lost in time, but the principle of the idea is timeless.

In the early days of Saddleback Church, Pastor Rick, Buford and Bob's mentor Peter Drucker (a.k.a. the father of modern management) talked about the baseball diamond model that Rick was working out in real time.

Rick laid out the discipleship progression most people follow, going from "knowing Christ" to "growing in Christ" to "serving Christ" to "sharing Christ." Home plate to first base. First to second. Second to third and third to home.

As Rick was unpacking the model in this conversation with Bob and Peter, one of them (we don't know which) made the insightful observation that while most individuals take the typical discipleship path, some (and I believe many Millennials) will encounter Christ first through a sense of calling, or service to others.

An encounter with the Living God is exactly what we pray for, but when this happens outside of the normal maturation process inherent in discipleship, we as leaders need

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to begin to fill in the gaps for Millennials. While they often gravitate toward the “go” that Wilson talks about in his book, *More*, it’s our job to help this generation fully embrace the “be” and the “do,” as well.

In the Millennials that I (Derek) have discipled, God has used that natural pull to “do” and “go” to create space for a relationship with Him. However, it is vitally important to go back and build a strong foundation.

In my experience, their sense of calling also changes once they have a more complete understanding that comes with foundational discipleship. It is always a beautiful thing when as a discipler, you see a Millennial walk into their unique calling *and* also surrender to God’s lordship.

Once that surrender comes and you see it transform their life and the way in which they live out God’s calling--it becomes more about Him and His unfolding story and less about them and their activity.

The point these three giants talked about that day was the idea that in today’s world, the idea of calling (by no means is it a new idea—God called Adam and Eve) is so powerful that many will feel the tug of God’s calling on their life—a pull that gradually leads them back to the basics and ultimately to fully realized spiritual maturity.

Without discipleship or primary calling, however, calling becomes something else. We have all seen examples of calling when it takes place in the absence of discipleship (though you may not have known that was what was happening or how to articulate it).

Both of us have seen what happens when people pursue their unique/secondary calling without pursuing God’s primary calling to make disciples.

Years ago, I (Derek) learned a valuable lesson from a friend who walked uber-high capacity men and women through the discovery process of their calling. I remember the epiphany my friend had when he began to understand that the individuals he was guiding were simply conquering the next hill and referring to it as calling.

These young men and women were certainly making incredible contributions to the Kingdom through their work, but it was an activity, not necessarily part of their spiritual journey. This particular leader was witnessing firsthand how a new believer goes around the base path the opposite way.

My friend began to lead his colleagues to actually take a step back and make sure any talk of personal calling was surrounded by ongoing discipleship and disciple making—being disciples who make disciples wherever they are.

For those individuals not willing to go back and align their personal calling with their primary calling (being disciplined and being a disciple maker), my friend began to see men and women make decisions, not understanding the theological implications.

Many burned out quickly because the foundation supporting their journey was not strong enough to carry the load farther on down the road.

I (Derek) often think about a very successful business leader I knew. He was passionately captured by needs in Rwanda. Acting on that passion, this business leader attacked some educational issues in the country, bringing his connections and resources to the table.

In the early days of the ministry, his scorecard looked pretty similar to his business scorecard--revenue up and to the right, expenses down, diplomas gained, etc. But once I guided

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this leader to circle back and build a strong discipleship foundation, his metrics began to change.

They included more Kingdom-advancing measurements like transformed lives, students embracing their calling, etc. As this leader's life was transformed, so was the unique work to which that God had called him. It was years after he began building this foundation that I saw his journey move from success to significance and finally to surrender.

This man had the right personality and was a get-it-done type of leader. He could pretty much drive success on his own. As he grew as a disciple of Christ, he began to experience new Kingdom significance. He began to see men and women engage Jesus, as well as great education.

As the journey moved forward, you saw him surrender to the lordship of Christ. His ministry really took on a new life because it was transformed from his next hill to conquer to God's call on his life.

Social Justice Outside of Discipleship

When Millennials don't keep their personal calling in context by aligning their secondary calling with their primary calling, we can confidently say that this generation that has so much world-changing potential will stumble on all of these obstacles—especially the social justice issue.

The pull on Christ followers to join the ranks of social justice warriors is scary when they pursue that justice outside of their primary calling of being and making disciples. Should we be warriors for justice? Yes. Our faith demands that we always seek justice, but justice must be rooted in the truths of Scripture, or it quickly becomes misguided.

If you don't know by now, we'll tell you that the Millennial generation is predisposed to look for justice. But without the discipleship piece in place and with the world whispering (or yelling) in both ears, they will easily make their calling about the next ministry fad, the next activist push, or even more harmful—a well-intentioned movement that ultimately does more harm than help because it fails to understand the basic tenets of our faith and how they fit together systemically to form a consistent theology.

It seems the “love wins” movement launched years ago by some popular authors has caused a great deal of confusion. Any semi-mature disciple understands the importance of love—it is God's chief posture toward His children. Love cannot be overvalued or over-practiced.

However, when love is taken out of the context of justice, mercy, truth and other tenets of our faith, it produces an incomplete system of theology. That, in turn, produces incomplete or skewed Christian practices.

Without well-shaped orthodoxy, our orthopraxy is confused, which leads to actions and activities that don't line up with Scripture. Millennials must have well-shaped doctrinal and theological constructs to ensure their lives reflect the Truth and their calling is built on a strong foundation.

The conversation about calling must be elevated within our churches and ministries but only in the context of robust discipleship. We both are grateful for the work of discipleship.org as they continue to raise the flag of discipleship. Their model and resources are equipping all of us for the more comprehensive journey.

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The organization [Made for More \(www.personalcalling.org\)](http://www.personalcalling.org) was recently launched anchored by the belief that calling is such a unique and vast aspect of discipleship.

Both organizations, along with their parent ministry, Exponential (exponential.org), are working hand-in-hand to encourage, inspire and equip the Church to help men and women of all ages discover their secondary calling and align it with their primary calling to be and make disciples.

As you understand that the calling conversation must take place in the context of discipleship, we can now work toward greater effectiveness by understanding these individuals that make up the largest living generation.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION (www.millennialscalling.com/community):

- Do you know of or use any frameworks for leading Millennials into their calling?
- Have you ever experienced calling-gone-wrong outside of the discipleship journey? What harm was caused?