



Father's Day, June 17, 2012
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It's Your Call: The Power of the Father's Call Genesis 12:1-4

Our daughter Rachel was home for a couple weeks between the end of Whitworth and the start of her job at Camp Spalding. It was great to have the whole family back together again... but a trip to Costco reminded me how I had gotten used to being a family of three. We came out, loaded up the car, and I climbed in behind the wheel. Cyndi got in next to me, I heard the back door open and close, and I started the car and began to pull away. And then I heard Rachel say, "Daddy... are you going to leave your other child behind?" There was Cooper in my rear view mirror, standing behind the cart and smiling at me as I drove off without him. Cooper is still recovering from the emotional scars of being forgotten by his father. But my failing does provide a vivid contrast to our story for the morning as we continue in our series on the Call of God. *[Read Genesis 12:1-4]*

Let's start this morning with a question: What is the one essential ingredient for a calling? A caller! Right? A voice from outside. But that's not how our culture understands calling. Google "calling" and you will discover that it means, "Pursuing your passion. Discovering your inner purpose. Doing the thing you were meant to do." One writer describes calling as "the abiding passion that shapes your life." Another promises, "How to discover your life purpose in about 20 minutes." The prevailing cultural opinion is that your "calling" is something from within you!

Dads, when your wife comes into a room with a phone in hand and says, "You have a call," what is your assumption? There is someone on the other end of that phone... someone who initiated a conversation with you. Calling assumes a caller. But it is symptomatic of our self-absorbed culture that the very word "calling"—which logically requires a caller—has morphed into meaning "a passion or a vision or a longing that arises from within ourselves."

Think of it this way. How many of you ever made one of these? [Two cans with a string.] You know how it works, right? Stretch it out, one person talks and the other person listens. This would be a good image of "call" wouldn't it? A voice on one end speaking... and you on the other, listening. But if you trust the blogosphere, this is what calling is really all about. *[Hold one can to mouth, the other to ear.]*

How silly is this? And it is exactly wrong; exactly the opposite of the most basic assumption about the idea of calling, which is this: the God of the Universe—entirely apart from and outside of ourselves—created you, gifted you, knows you, saved you, and has placed a call upon your life. A call to be in relationship with him as our loving sovereign, first of all, and then a call to fulfill His purpose in your life.

Take a look at our story this morning. Who was Abram? We know nothing about him. He suddenly appears in the last part of Genesis 11. He has a dad named Terah, a wife named Sarai, no kids. Abram lives with his father in a place called Haran, and then his dad dies. That's about it. We don't know anything about Abram's personality, his faith, his faithfulness, his giftedness, his passions or dreams or longing. We just know that there is a guy in the middle of the Middle East, going about his life, and suddenly the call comes... from the Caller.

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This is one of those bedrock moments in the Bible. That moment when Abram—a worshipper of idols in a pagan land—was called by the one true God into a covenant relationship. Did God call Abram because of who he was or what he had? Because of his connections and wealth and power? No! In fact, God's call to Abram begins with his demand to leave behind everything that seems to make him important or influential. Leave his country, leave his people, leave his father's household... and an invitation to go to a brand new place. The starting point for the call of Abram was the utter abandonment of everything that gave him his identity.

Where? Where was that place? God didn't say! Abram couldn't even go to Mapquest, plot out the journey and figure out the high points they ought to visit along the way. God said, "You will go to the place that I will show you." Leave everything you know... and go to everything you do not know. Why? Because I said so... because I am calling you to myself and for my purposes.

This is not a story of Abram's vision, Abram's longings, Abram's sense of destiny. It is all about God's calling. Notice the prominence of the divine personal pronoun in the story. Count them. How many "I"s do you find? "...go to the land **I** will show you... **I** will make you a great nation... **I** will bless you... **I** will make your name great... **I** will bless those who bless you... **I** will curse those who don't."

The Bible is clear that every one of us has a call upon our lives. The sooner you discover that call and begin to live into that call, the sooner you will know what it means to live the abundant life of which Jesus spoke; to experience the peace of

which Jesus spoke; to live a life that is filled with joy and purpose as Jesus promised. And the starting point of that call—the absolute essential starting point for us—is realizing that we are not the starting point. God is. If you think that you are going to discover your purpose, your destiny—by burrowing down, drumming it up, or figuring it out—then you are missing entirely the point of call.

So the essential first thing to know about your calling is that it comes from a Caller—outside of yourself—which means that the very best thing you can do if you want to discover God’s calling for your life is to stop looking for it in your giftedness, or your circumstances, or your passions, or your dreams or visions. The starting point is to stop, bow before God and say, “I am here, I am yours, I am ready to follow... what would you have me to do?” I remember a season in my ministry about 7 years ago where I really did not know what God wanted me to do... even whether to stay here or not. I didn’t even know how to pray. So my daily, repeated prayer became, “It’s your church, I’m your man, it’s your call.” If you want to discover your purpose in this life, the last place you start is by looking inward. The first place you start is on your knees before the caller saying, “Here I am. I’m ready.”

So the first and essential ingredient of call is the Caller. Here’s the second: The primary call of God is to himself, not to a task. When we think of “the call of God” we often jump quickly to that thing I am supposed to do for God. I am called to lead a church. I am called to be a teacher. I am called to care for my children. I am called to be a creator of jobs. And that can be your secondary call, but it is not your primary call. The primary call of every Christian is exactly the same. What is it? ...to be with God.

At the beginning of John’s gospel, disciples of John the Baptist start following Jesus. He turns around and asks them sharply, “What do you want?” How would you respond to that question from Jesus? “What do you want?” Here is their amazing reply. “Where are you staying?” What? The Son of God asks these men, “What do you want?” and the best they can do is, “Where are you staying?” They didn’t ask for miracles or spiritual insights or prophecies. That asked to hang out with Jesus... to be with Him. It seems goofy and trivial, but the more I think about it, the more I wonder if they had it right. Jesus must have thought so, too, because He said, “Come... and you will see.”

And as a matter of fact, Jesus replays that invitation again and again. When Jesus called other disciples by Galilee, what did he say? “Follow me!” Another time He said, “Come to me.” Even God’s call to Abram underscored this point. Where was Abram to go? To the land that God would show him! The very heart of this great biblical call was that God was not going to spill so much of the beans that Abram could ignore the Caller and get on with his work. God built relationship and dependence into his call to Abram. “Come to me; stick with me, and I will show you where I want you to go.” It is what He most wants with us, too. Oswald

Chambers once wrote, "The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service for Him..."

For all of us who want to do something meaningful for God, this is enormously important—this discovery that we cannot get to our secondary calling without discovering our primary calling. If I spend all my prayer time asking, "What shall I do, what shall I do, what shall I do..." I am missing the point. The greater and greatest purpose of our secondary calling—the things we "do" in life—is to reinforce our primary calling to be in relationship with Christ. That is where we find our calling and identity... in our relationship with Jesus. If we find our identity in the things we think we are called to... if your identity is rooted in your job, or in your marriage, or in your parenting... then what happens when things shake loose? When you lose your job, when your marriage gets rocky, when your kids leave home... what happens to your call then?

Don't get me wrong: what we are called to do for God is important—and we will get to that in the weeks to come—but it is not most important. Our primary call is to be **with** God, not to do for God.

This morning's Father's Day service is a wonderful opportunity for you to hear from men who have discovered that their call starts with the Caller; that their primary calling is to be in relationship with Him. Why does Dave Eubank serve in the jungles of Burma? Because he has heard the loving call of God to draw near to him... and then go where He leads. How did Gary turn his life around from despair and hopelessness? He heard the call of God that said, "Draw near to me. Let my love be sufficient for you." And 40 men who went to Mexico learned more about what it means to follow the call of God. Some thought their call was to build houses. What they discovered was the Caller who said, "I want to build you; I want to build a relationship with you. Come close to me."

[Move with cans to someone] As you listen to these stories, as you think about your own call—the purpose and meaning of your life—ask yourself this question: Does it look like this? *[Can to someone else]* Or like this? *[Can to self]*

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Read Genesis 11: 27-32. How did God use Abram's circumstances to prepare him for his call. (Hint, take note of verse 31.)
 2. What does the word "calling" mean in our culture? What did Pastor Mark say is the absolute basic ingredient of "calling." How is this principle revealed in Gen 12: 1-4? What does it mean for us who want to "discover" God's call upon our lives?
 3. Pastor spoke of a primary calling that is the same for every Christian as well as secondary calling. What is our primary calling? How does that come out in the call of Jesus to his disciples and the call of God to Abram in Genesis 12: 1?