



CORE CALL: KINGDOM CALL SURRENDER, LORDSHIP AND GOD'S CALLING

BY CAS MONACO

1 : Introduction

This past summer my husband (Bob) and I spent six weeks in Siena, Italy on a Campus Crusade Summer Project. Our purpose was to share the Gospel with as many Italian students as possible. Between great coffee, creamy gelato, and deliciouso pasta, our team of 13 talked to several hundred – and had a great time in the process. I loved walking the steep cobblestone streets of Siena; it was great exercise, especially early in the morning before the town woke up and shops opened for the day's business. I remember one particular sunny, warm Saturday morning grabbing my iPod and heading to the Campo (the town's center square). As I began my walk, the song *He Reigns* by Newsboys started playing: *"It's the song of the redeemed rising from the African plain, the song of the forgiven drowning out the Amazon rain, the song of Asian believers filled with God's Holy fire, it's every tribe, every tongue, every nation, a love song born of a gratefully choir, it's all God's children singing: Glory, Glory, Halleluiah, He Reigns."* These words rang (loudly) through my ears, into my head, and washed over my heart as I walked past men and women, boys and girls from all over the world. It was one of those moments of clarity. I could see with my own eyes God's rich plan of redemption in the colorful faces passing me by. It motivated me to realize, again, that God brought me into His plan – long ago – and was using me and the team to further His kingdom.

It was no mere coincidence that our team settled in Siena for the summer. It was no mistake that we shared the gospel with lots of Italians, a Palestinian, an Israeli, several Romanians, and two guys from Togo. It's nothing for God to bring His children across the world to shine the light of Christ right into the lives and experiences of the people He wants to see know Him. I'm increasingly amazed by God's grand plan of redemption, His commitment to establishing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Plus, He chooses to use you and me as His image bearers – the awesome privilege of representing Jesus everywhere we go and in everything we do. I was acutely aware of that fact as we interacted with the owners of our hostel, the baristas and gelato scoopers we encountered every day, even the wrinkled Italian grandma at whom we waved from our window whenever she passed. It was no mistake we were there, in that moment, shining the light of the Gospel in Siena. We must not take lightly the role God has called us to in advancing His kingdom. We may never know, this side of heaven, how He used the hundreds of spiritual conversations we had with students about the Gospel. It's an awesome privilege to be ambassadors for Christ.

Six weeks later I was back in Portland, Oregon shopping at Albertsons and stopped by Starbucks to help re-adjust my expectations of a good cup of coffee. I contemplated how God's kingdom spreads all over the world – from the cobblestone streets in Siena to the cashier at the grocery store in Portland. And no matter what career path we choose, no matter what stage of life we're in, we're *called*, as God's image bearers, to participate in the kingdom of God.

I find it pretty amazing that the Lord has a specific call and purpose for all of His children, don't you? *"For you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10). The purpose behind this little guidebook is to help you figure out your particular call, your particular part in God's kingdom.

Chances are, since you're reading these words, you're in search of that seemingly elusive call of God. To some it feels like this "call" is reserved for those extraordinarily dedicated individuals headed for the remotest parts of the earth. "Certainly He'll never call *me*, I'm not spiritual enough. I barely know the Bible, I'm afraid to share my faith." There's one part of you that hopes to never hear that call, you're happy with the plans you've made. You're comfortable right where you are. I'd venture to guess (because you're reading these words) that there's another part of you that *longs* with anticipation for God to point His finger at you, calling you out of a long lineup to represent Him somewhere in the world.

Sometimes, during seasons of decision-making, several voices compete for our attention. How do you know if you're hearing God's call or someone else's? Well-meaning friends and family offer advice, share experiences, provide business connections, and push toward choices promising long-term stability and financial security. How do you discern which advice and information is coming from God?

Imagine if you will...

When you started college your goal was to become an Engineer like your dad. You worked hard to do well in class and maintain a GPA as close as possible to a 4.0. Your dad repeatedly tells you, "You were made to be an engineer." He's so proud of you, which feels pretty good. Then, you spend a summer on a mission trip in South America. Your life, goals, passions, and desires are turned upside down as the Lord leads you in a completely new direction. Vocational ministry was never an option... until now.

How will you ever break the news to your parents? Is it really fair to change direction after they've invested in your education?

Now, maybe you're majoring in Spanish. You've invested all four years of college in ministry. You love sharing your faith and teaching others to follow Jesus, and as much as you want to be in full-time ministry, the Lord is opening doors for you to teach school in the inner city of Chicago.

How do you make sense of a drastic change of purpose?

You have no idea what you're supposed to do with your life. You recently graduated with a degree in Geology, and you currently manage a Starbucks. Even if jobs for geologists were abundant and available, you have no interest in pursuing that avenue. In fact, the more you read the Bible, the more aware you are of God's kingdom and your role in living out and proclaiming the Gospel. But, you have absolutely no idea what to do or how to do it.

Where do you start? How do you find and pursue "kingdom" options?

The proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel" helped you persevere through four years of Business school. A good paying job, a loving spouse, a nice house in suburbia, a few kids, and, of course, finding a good church fit in there somewhere too. Your involvement in leadership with Cru was an important component of your spiritual growth in college, but now, a few years have passed by, and things aren't playing out like you planned. You have a decent job; you're marginally involved in church, but the zeal for the Gospel which at one time fueled your passion for ministry is running way low. You're just not sure where you fit in ministry. Somehow the picture perfect became so much more important you're your love for and devotion to Jesus.

What does it take to develop meaning and purpose in ministry, and deepen your devotion for the Lord once you've finished school?

Scenarios like these play out in our lives as God's children all of the time. He moves in our hearts, gifts us with abilities and passions to help build His kingdom, and calls us His children. He relentlessly pursues and calls us to follow Him in mysterious and sometimes confusing ways. He urges us to worship Him through sacrifice and surrender. He allows heartache and sorrow to draw us closer to a life of dependence. He then actually uses us as His ambassadors to pass on the great news of the Gospel.

God's call is, on one hand, very personal, unique, sort of mystical, and sometimes even experiential. On the other hand, it's quite clear and very similar for every believer. The purpose of this study is to explore two aspects of God's call. First, we'll seek to uncover your **Core Call**, the expression of your unique personality, gifts, and abilities. Second, we'll explore your **Kingdom Call**, which is the unique place in which God calls you to live out your core call on a road trip or in a coffee shop, on your dorm floor or in class, on the job or in relationships.

I guarantee this guidebook won't answer all of your questions, but it's my prayer it will provide helpful principles regarding God's call that will help you make Gospel-centered decisions throughout your life. I've purposefully included my journey as a backdrop because I'm an ordinary person, chosen by God to bear fruit for the kingdom. I want to share the ways in which He used His Word, people, and experiences to show me His call. I'm amazed how the Lord works in and through our lives in such a personal way to help fulfill His grand and eternal purpose. He has plans for you. I hope to help you discover and embrace God's call.

2 : Story

My dreams, as a young girl, weren't very lofty. I had friends who aspired to be doctors and lawyers, politicians and journalists; I just wanted to get married. Even as a little girl my sights were set on boys and being loved. I remember, as a skinny little nine year old, getting in big trouble for calling boys on the phone. My mom lectured me – wagging her finger in my face – and warned me of the danger of chasing after boys. I didn't listen.

I had a major crush on David W. in second grade (as did most of the girls). On one occasion, in order to get his attention, I played “damsel in distress” with my friend Robin. I jumped off her balcony – twice – and broke my wrist. David never came. A year later, in an effort to snag David's affections, I begged him to play a game with me during recess. I pestered him to the point that he punched me in the stomach. Brutal – I know. But, I sort of deserved it.

All throughout elementary school, I wrote prayers in my diary to a God I didn't know, “Dear God, please give me a boyfriend.”

My pursuit continued throughout junior high and high school. As I got older the stakes got higher; there was so much more to lose. The compromises I made in high school and college make me sad as I reflect back. My diary entries began to include a prayer to a God who seemed so far away, “Please forgive me for my sins.” I remember many discussions with my dad about waiting for the right kind of guy: the guy

who would willingly go to great lengths to see me and be with me. I'd shake my head in agreement, but inside I was afraid that if I waited I'd never find him.

"Dear God, please give me a boyfriend."

I got to college and my longing persisted. I loved being in school, pledged a sorority, and even though I was in a long-distance relationship, I kept my options open, hoping that I'd finally find the right guy. In the background of my memories from my freshman year, Linda Ronstadt is singing, "I've been cheated, been mistreated, when will I find real love?" My long-distance boyfriend started talking about marriage that spring, so I decided to make it easy for him and quit school. I moved back home and waited for a proposal. Six months later we broke up. I vowed, at 19 years old, never to date again. Five months later I was engaged to someone new.

My prayer was finally answered. I was planning a wedding with a shiny diamond on my finger. My dream was about to come true at last. I finally met a guy who really loved me and I really loved him – and my dad liked him too. Then, just 10 days before the ceremony, Scott dropped a bomb – over the phone. He didn't want to marry me and the wedding was called off. I was devastated.

"I've been cheated, been mistreated, when will I find real love?"

In the midst of returning the wedding dress and the matching, shiny white shoes; relaying the terrible news to the guests on the rather long list; cancelling the flowers, the cake, and the photographer; and, watching the pile of wedding gifts increase; my neighbor, Lynn, invited me over for coffee. There was something different about her. She was religious but in a compelling kind of way. She was fun to talk to and easy to be with. She talked about God like she really knew Him. I knew she'd listen without offering me empty condolences. She did. After I'd shared the long, sordid story, Lynn explained that the kind of love that I was looking for wasn't found in a man. In my heart, I was thinking, "I find that a little hard to believe." The only place she said I'd find real love was in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Lynn shared John 3:16 with me, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.*" She talked to me for a long time about God's love and forgiveness – both of which I desperately needed.

That sunny summer afternoon I went home, knelt down on the green shag carpet in my bedroom, and asked God to forgive my sins and for Jesus to be my Savior. That day, Jesus Christ broke through and reached into my broken heart and saved me from the penalty and destruction of my sin. He lavished me in His amazing grace. And, because of God's great love and mercy, a new and eternal relationship was born out of a ruined and devastating one, along with a new and eternal purpose.

With Lynn's encouragement I began praying to this God I barely knew. I moved to a new city and started life over. She told me to ask God for help to find a job and an apartment. So I did. I soon found a job and moved into an apartment managed by a Christian – I could tell because he had a Bible on his desk. Jeff often talked to me about Jesus and going to church; he even encouraged me to join a Bible study with other girls. I listened politely, but continued to pursue boys (some habits die hard.) As a result, I found myself in deeper trouble than I'd ever known. Yet, all the while, I read the Bible Lynn had given me, (even though it didn't make a lot of sense), and I talked often about my new relationship with Jesus.

One particularly bleak evening that fall I was standing in line at the grocery store. Next to the Chiclets and Lifesavers was a magazine "*Rounder*" that held a little book called "The Jesus Person Promise Pocket

Book". I knew I was a "Jesus Person" and I desperately needed His promises. As I reflect back, I'm sure He put that book there just for me. At about the same time, the film "Jesus" was released in theaters. I was hungry to know all I could about Him, so one Saturday afternoon, I went and saw the movie. I remember sitting motionless in that theater, along with about three other people, soaking it all in. Jesus became more and more real to me during those turbulent months.

My job as an administrative assistant paid the bills but promised little or no future. I can see now that the Lord used my parents to convince me to return to college. Six months after packing my little red Honda and escaping, I reluctantly returned home. As I backed my car out of the parking lot, Jeff, who stood beside me during those trying months, offered some final advice, "Get involved in Campus Crusade for Christ when you get on campus."

As I reflect back on those beginning days and months with Jesus, I realize God's call began with a bang and a whisper. He heard my childhood prayers and stirred up a storm. He entered into my heart and transformed both instantly and ever so quietly.

Reflect

Recently my friend's four year old daughter, Eden, seemingly out of the blue, announced to her mom that she was ready to receive Christ into her life. Her mom, wanting to treasure the experience and share it with the rest of the family, asked her to wait until they got home. Eden waited and then at dinner announced for a second time that she was ready to pray. Again, her mom asked her to wait until the dishes were cleared and the mood was set. Her siblings and parents gathered, and her mom began to explain – once more – what this decision meant. Before she could finish, Eden, tired of waiting, prayed. She was ready and needed no more explanation. Jesus called and she responded.

Whether you were a small child or an adult, whether your circumstances were simple and serene or wild and desperate, He called your name. He invited you join Him in holy fellowship with an eternal purpose.

- ❖ How did Jesus Christ first get your attention? Maybe, like me, the Lord brought you to the end of your rope; or, like Eden, He called your name when you were very young. Either way, reflect back to that point in time when you received Christ as your Savior – whether it was a specific day or a general space in time – and record the different ways the Lord manifested Himself and the gospel to you.
- ❖ Describe the impact the Gospel had on your life and the lives of those around you.
- ❖ How is the Lord manifesting Himself in your life now? Are you experiencing His familiar touch, is He calling your name? How do you know?

Respond

I often reflect back on that particular year of my life with a deep sense of gratitude and awe. "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found was blind but now I see." The Lord used Scott, Lynn and Jeff, *The Jesus Person Promise Pocket Book*, and a host of poor choices to draw me to Jesus.

- ❖ ***“Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;
Who pardons all your iniquities;
Who heals all your diseases;
Who redeems your life from the pit;
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;
Who satisfies your years with good things.
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle” (Psalm 103:1-5).***

Bless the Lord for His benefits and forgiveness, His healing touch and redemption in your life. Praise Him for His lovingkindness and compassion, for the good things you receive from His hand every day. Thank Him for not only saving you, but also for giving you purpose. And, by faith, trust that He will make His call upon your life clear.

- ❖ ***“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life” (John 3:16 NLT).***
 - Praise Him for His sacrificial love. Thank Him for Jesus – the perfect, sinless Son—the ultimate expression of God’s love.
 - Thank Him for loving you then (at the point of salvation) and now.
- ❖ If you’ve been resisting, unwilling to stop and listen, talk to the Lord. Tell Him why. Ask for His help to focus as you consider His “call” in your life.
- ❖ ***“For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan from the beginning of time—to show us His grace through Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 1:9 NLT).***
 - Stop and wonder. God, from the beginning of time, purposed to use you to display His grace. How is this possible and how does this make you feel?
 - He saved us and called us to live a holy life – what do you think this means on a practical level?

3 : Surrender

She purposefully waited until midday to make the trek to Jacob’s well. She did everything she could to avoid encountering anyone from town. Everyone knew about her five failed marriages and frowned upon the fact that she was living with someone new. Her life was a mess and she didn’t need to be

reminded of her failure. As she neared the well a man, a Jewish man at that, asked her to give him a drink. Jews never spoke to Samaritans, let alone to a Samaritan woman.

This man was different. This Man was the Son of God, offering her water that would quench an even deeper thirst. *“Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).* He offered her this water. And upon tasting this water, the Samaritan woman, after meeting the Messiah, left her waterpot, and ran into the city to tell others about Him. Eventually, many came to know the *“One who is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).*

Jesus changes everything – He changes us. He gives meaning and purpose to an otherwise routine way of life. He takes the mess and makes it new. He enters into our hearts and takes up residence in such a way that not only changes us but also the community around us. But, this change is not without cost.

Six months after leaving home to start over, I returned home, again, to start over. The Lord brought Lynn’s careful guidance before me once again: I began to read my Bible and attend a prayer gathering in her home. This little group of women shared their hearts and struggles, interceding for one another with great faith in the One to whom they prayed. It was clear that they knew Him on a heart level. I was awestruck.

They prayed for me as I returned to school that January. And nearly every week before my Algebra exam I called Lynn (from the campus payphone) and asked her to pray for me. I attribute my passing grade to her faithful prayers to the God who knows all about Algebra.

Naively I registered for a *New Testament Thought* class that first term. What better way to get three credits than combine my eagerness to learn more about the Bible and finish school? Much to my surprise, the professor hated Christ and Christians. He didn’t believe the Bible to be God’s Word. Lynn helped me with her prayers and wisdom discern the truth amid his lies. The Lord used my angry, unbelieving professor to strengthen my tender faith. Ever so slowly Jesus became more real to me.

As I wandered around campus, I kept my eyes open for Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC). Within the first week of class I found their information table in the Student Center “manned,” much to my delight, by men – several of them -- and all good looking! I decided right then and there to get involved. My desire for love and marriage had never faded, and CCC looked quite promising.

Just a few days after signing up for a Bible Study Kathy (a CCC staff member) called me. She offered to meet with me in the Student Center that week and I agreed – as long as we met in the smoking section (I was more than a little “rough around the edges”). Not only did Kathy take me through “basic follow-up” but she also helped me with my math. I remember being so encouraged by her loving words and patience with me. She never judged my outward actions – I was pretty rough around the edges – but pointed me to Christ every time we met. The Lord used her to help me understand Him in ways that made Him much more real.

That first spring, at just the right time it seemed, Kathy persuaded me to attending a retreat. I didn't want to go and made up several excuses not to attend. But she promised me a ride, the opportunity to room with her, and the guarantee that if I didn't have a great time, she'd refund my money. For reasons beyond her control I ended up driving with three people I'd never met and rooming with girls I didn't know.

I had never attended a retreat where several hundred college students sang praises to Jesus Christ. I'd never seen anything like it before. Josh McDowell taught from the book of Romans. For the first time, the Bible and the Spirit-filled life began to make sense to me. I don't really remember why; except from that point on I experienced a greater sense of freedom and a deeper desire to follow Christ. In fact, it was there I believe the Lord first *called* me to serve Him with my life.

In case you're wondering, I didn't ask Kathy for a refund.

Reflect

"A certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:18-22).

There's a price to pay when we choose to pursue Christ. He calls us to surrender our comfort, our hopes and dreams, to take up our cross and daily follow Him saying, "Not my will but Yours, O Lord."

Those early months on campus weren't without drama. My parents didn't understand my newfound faith at all. I still battled constantly between my new life in Christ and my old life in the flesh. I had no money, no idea what to major in, and no boyfriend. The same longing for love that plagued me before still pulled at my heart and my affections: it felt like nothing else but a husband would satisfy. So, I dated guys who had no regard for God. Every time, I either felt disappointment or regret.

Then, at the spring retreat, I had the opportunity to get to meet Bob. I first noticed him at the CCC table I mentioned earlier. His Italian good-looks and fun sense of humor attracted me right away. I even told Kathy on a few occasions that I wanted to get to know him better because there was something so different about him. Well, at the retreat he invited me to join him for pancakes one morning. He talked to me about the Lord and the Word, and shared stories about his own faith and walk with God. Because he was on staff with CCC and older than me, I figured I was "out of my league." But that didn't stop me from praying. In the weeks and months that followed I started to attend Cru meetings and events and began getting to know Bob better. He was altogether different than any guy I'd ever met because he loved God and served Him with his whole heart. Just before he left for the summer, he bought me a coke and told me that he was interested in pursuing a relationship with me. He wanted to pray for confirmation from God over the summer. I was, of course, beside myself with excitement. Maybe Bob was "the one!"

Fervently and with great dedication I prayed daily for God's confirmation – something I'd never done before. Kathy prayed, Lynn prayed and God continued to work on my heart. One afternoon, alone in my apartment, I was listening to a message given by a 40 year old, single woman. Her joy and contentment in Jesus flowed from her words. Up until that moment, I'd never considered the possibility that God's plan for me might *not* include a husband. The Lord asked in the way only He can, "will you follow Me even if you never have a husband?" Twenty years of *longing, striving, and hoping* flooded my heart. I couldn't imagine! But, I opened my hands and laid it all out before the Lord: "even if I never marry, I will follow You."

Everyday, moment by moment, we face the choice to yield our will to His: humility over recognition, gentleness over anger, or needs of others over our own. Over the course of my life in Christ, I've found that whenever something comes along that threatens His rightful place as Lord in my heart, He asks for it back. Am I willing to follow Him even if...? Even if I never marry, even if I disappoint my parents, even if it means doing something or going someplace vastly different than I ever imagined?

Each time He asks, I struggle with His request. Each time I open my hand and, with fear and trepidation, surrender my treasure back, He blesses me with so much more. Each time, I realize that following His call was not a one-time event, but a lifetime of choices all aimed at making more of Him and less of me.

- ❖ God demonstrated His vast, immeasurable and undeserved love by sending His perfect and sinless Son to die for us. Ephesians 2:4-5 exclaims, "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)...." It's important to remember His rich mercy and great love, His ultimate sacrifice in the midst of our own.
 - Consider what might keep you, or perhaps has kept you, from following Jesus with a whole heart. Here are some examples: a relationship, fear of unfulfilled expectations, concern over disappointing your parents or your mentors, lack of desire or motivation, fear that He might call you either to the secular workplace or full-time ministry, anxiety over not being provided for financially. Make a list of whatever the Lord brings to mind.

- ❖ Over the years the Lord has used these promises to encourage, challenge and push me forward when I've felt confused, stuck or downright stubborn. The theme throughout this short list is *God and trust*. When all is said and done, it boils down to trusting God. Essentially that's what it's all about. Write these down in your journal and meditate on each one in light of your particular circumstances. Then talk to the Lord about whatever it is that's holding you back from following Him fully.

- Psalm 9:10

- Psalm 25:11
 - Psalm 31:14-15; Job 14:5
 - Proverbs 3:5-6; 16:3, 9; Proverbs 19:21
 - Jeremiah 29:11-12
 - Matthew 6:24-33
 - James 1:3-5
- ❖ Interview two or three people who you know walk closely with the Lord, people who have experienced life and surrender, and know what it means to sacrifice. Record your observations and the insights and counsel you receive. Tuck this away for future reference.

Respond

“I urge you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

- ❖ **Sacrifice:** *“The surrender of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim.”*¹ Read this definition over a few times and then meditate upon Romans 12:1.
 - There’s really nothing more prized or desirable than your own life, which we’re urged to present to God as an acceptable act of worship. Determining your “call” begins right here with a willingness to surrender to Jesus Christ.
- ❖ **Surrender:** *“To yield (something) to the possession or power of another”*² – what does it mean for you?
- ❖ If you’re not ready to open your hand to the Lord, continue to talk with Him about your fears and concerns. Bring everything into the light of His grace.

4 : Follow

It was a day like any other. Peter and Andrew, seasoned fisherman, casting their nets into the sea expecting the usual catch of fish, and hoping for a little bit more. On the shore James and John mended their well-used nets, under the watchful eye of their father Zebedee. It was their routine, their job, their way-of-life.

Until they met Jesus and everything changed -- forever.

¹ www.dictionary.com

² *ibid*

“And He said to them, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” And they immediately left the nets, and their father, and followed Him” (Matthew 4:18-22). Imagine an exasperated Zebedee suddenly alone on the boat’s deck, a knotted net hanging from his hands, yelling, “Hey, where are you going? We still have work to do!” What compelled these men to leave their boats and nets and freshly caught fish – and their father -- behind, to follow Christ *immediately*? Was it His voice? Imagine hearing the call of God audibly – that’s what we’d all like, right?

Jesus led these four from the seashore to the synagogue where He amazed them with His authoritative teaching, and astounded them with His power to rebuke an unclean spirit. They went from the synagogue to Simon Peter’s house where Jesus healed his host’s mother-in-law, and by the time the sun began to set that very evening, “the whole city gathered at the door,” bringing to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. As I turn the pages of the gospel accounts, I see a leper cleansed, a paralytic walk, a man’s withered hand restored, eight more men chosen and called as disciples, a woman 12 years in her sickness healed, and a little girl is raised from the dead. All of this, and more, took place within the course of a few days.

Woven throughout these miraculous events, Jesus explains that His purpose for coming was to preach forgiveness of sins and the kingdom of God. And, as we study the gospels, we watch God’s call unfold for the chosen twelve, and ultimately for anyone who follows Christ and culminates in the Great Commission:

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

In my experience I have found that while the Great Commission includes every believer, there’s a process of ownership that takes place over time. And, while the basic premise remains the same for all of us, I believe the Holy Spirit speaks to each of us differently – what compels and motivates me will most likely look different for you. The Lord uses our experiences, moments of surrender, inspiring people, unique events, along with His Word to shape what I like to describe as our **Core Call**: a sort of beacon that helps us make logistical decisions along the way. Who we choose to marry, where we work and live, how we spend our money or treat our neighbor are all important decisions. Once we determine our core call, then we’re able to make decisions that keep us on track. Let me explain. After I attended the spring retreat and experienced a community of growing believers, I continued attending the Bible Study Kathy led and began going to Cru meetings on campus. I learned how to share my faith and began talking to my friends and family about how Jesus changed my life. Within a few months, my younger brother received Christ. Within a year, my Mom did too. I started leading a Bible study of my own on campus, even though I barely knew anything about the Bible.

I received great ministry training on campus (for which I'm so grateful) and it was during those initial few years as a student that I began to understand Campus Crusade's distinctives: **Win** students to Christ, **Build** them in their faith, and **Send** them to the world to Win, Build and Send. John 15:16 became my "battle cry" on campus: "[Jesus said] *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.*"

In addition to ministry opportunities on campus, I also began attending a local church. Within a short period of time, I was teaching the bible to women in the church. The first book of the Bible that I ever studied in depth was Philippians, which remains one of my all-time favorites. Philippians 3:7-8 stood out to me right from the beginning, "*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ....*"

And, one year later Bob asked me to marry him. We were engaged for a year while I finished school, and then just two weeks after our wedding I joined the staff of CCC. Can I tell you how excited I was? God answered my prayers in ways that far exceeded my expectations. When I look back and think about where my life *could have been* and where it is today I'm humbled and amazed. By the grace of God I surrendered my desire to marry, and in His goodness He blessed me with "exceeding abundantly beyond all that I could ever ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

It was those God-ordained experiences that shaped my **Core Call** to follow Christ. There were times, during our early years of marriage (and sometimes now) that Bob would talk about leaving full-time ministry to get a job as either a mailman or a cashier at 7-Eleven. These "aspirations" usually came on days when he felt discouraged or frustrated, but I remember one particular day when the Lord seemed to challenge me to explore the idea of leaving "the ministry". What if we did leave vocational ministry?, I reflected back on my life as a follower of Christ and realized that it didn't really matter what I did vocationally. I was chosen and appointed as God's child to go and bear fruit, to count all things as loss in view of knowing and serving Jesus. Ultimately, whether I was a CCC staff member, the wife of a mailman or a 7-Eleven cashier, I was called to follow Jesus, and commissioned to win, build and send.

That "particular day" I mentioned was about twenty years ago. Since then, I've found that while the "logistics" of my life have changed in numerous ways, the Lord has strengthened and matured His **Core Call** on my life.

Reflect

- ❖ Stop here for awhile and reflect on your life and experience with the Lord. In Lesson One, you looked at and remembered how God called you to Himself, the people He used, the way in which He drew you, etc.

- Now take some time and think about the people and circumstances that the Lord has used the most to influence and shape you as His follower. Make a list both of the people and/or circumstances and the reason behind your choice.

One of the people that I include on my list of influencers is a woman named Amy Carmichael. She was a self-sent missionary to India in the early 1900's. From the time she was a young teenager until the day she died, Amy was passionate about sharing the gospel. She spent some time in China in her early 20's, but due to health problems was sent home; then, because of her Core Call to follow God, she eventually ended up starting her own mission in India. After a serious injury, Amy was basically bedridden the last 20 years of her life (she lived into her 80's). She never left India and continued serving the Lord from her bed by writing and praying. She inspires me because despite all kinds of obstacles throughout her life she followed Christ and obeyed His call.

Reading missionary biographies is inspiring and can be quite challenging. I'd suggest some or all of the following:

[Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur](#) by Frank B. Houghton

[Through Gates of Splendor](#) (the story of Jim Elliot) by Elisabeth Elliot

[Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret](#) by Howard and Geraldine

[The Evangelization of the World in this Generation](#) by John Mott

[A Passion for the Impossible: The Life of Liliias Trotter](#) by Miriam Huffman Rockness

Respond

Imagine what it was like when Peter, Andrew, James and John took a walk "down memory road" and reminisced about that fateful day when Jesus showed up on their dock. Nothing in their lives was ever the same after taking that initial step of faith to follow the Son of God. In fact, for the next three years they followed Jesus all over Galilee, and even watched Him go to the cross.

As they recalled Jesus hanging on the cross, I'm sure a hush fell in the room. What a terrifying moment in their three year history together. They all abandoned Him, left Him to face the authorities and death alone. Fortunately, the story didn't end there -- Jesus rose from the grave! What was it like for the disciples, huddled in the same room where they'd enjoyed a great meal with Jesus just days before, to conceive, one minute, that He's dead -- gone forever, and the next, to see Him appear right before their eyes?

Everything began to fall into place over the next several weeks. Just before Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He commissioned His followers: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me; Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Their **core call** was clear: "Go make disciples of all nations..." on the authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The book of Acts records some of the amazing things that happened after Jesus ascended – the first of which was the giving of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ didn't leave His disciples alone, but sent His Spirit to live inside each one, giving them power to be His witnesses. Acts gives us a great picture of men and women who followed Christ and listened to His call (along with those who didn't). The result of their commitment to follow Christ led to great revival. Thousands believed in Jesus! Riots ensued, tearing apart cities and families. Death orders came for some, imprisonment for others. Miracles of various kinds, performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, reminded many of Jesus' own actions on earth. Jesus Christ was at the center of these disciples' **core call**. They understood, in a very personal way, what His death, burial and resurrection meant for them and for "all nations".

- ❖ I firmly believe that we need God's Word at the foundation of our **Core Call**. God and His Word don't change. Because our feelings and circumstances do, it really helps to have the stability of the Word at the "core" of our call. I cannot tell you the number of times, when in great despair, fear and frustration, I've wanted to quit. I'm not sure I ever wanted to be a 7-Eleven cashier, but I've definitely questioned myself and God along the way. It's always during *one of those days* that God's has used His Word to give me perspective and to remind me of His call on my life. Philippians 3:7-8 and John 15:16 are like plumb-lines God uses to bring me back to His purpose for my life.
 - What Scripture has He used to challenge and inspire you along your journey of faith? Once again, it helps to reflect back on your life as a believer – whether you're looking back two years or 20, think about those verses or passages that the Lord has used and continues to use in your life over and over again.
 - Begin to formulate a sentence or two that states what you believe to be your **Core Call**. We'll come back to this and I'll give you some examples later. But start working on it now. Since this is a process, use a pencil! You can always adjust and refine your work. It doesn't have to be fancy or eloquent, but it helps if it's clear, concise and easy for you to remember.

5 : Storms

"And a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead." And when He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves; but He Himself was asleep. And they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" And He said to them, "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:18-27)"

Peter, Andrew, James and John, at Jesus' invitation, immediately drop everything and follow Christ – all over Galilee. They listen as He preaches the gospel of the kingdom, watch as He heals every kind of disease and sickness, stand by as He raises people from the dead, and passes out lunch to thousands of people -- twice. I can just picture them giving one another a pinch or an elbow-nudge just to make sure they aren't dreaming.

But it's not long before they're in the middle of a great storm; walls of water cover their boat as it pitches back and forth in the raging sea. These seasoned fishermen who no doubt weathered a lot of storms, now feared for their lives. They cry out to Jesus, "Save us Lord, we are perishing." Mark's Gospel adds, "Don't You care that we're perishing?"

Jesus wakes up and rebukes the wind and water. In an *instant* the wild and windy storm stops, and the sea becomes perfectly calm. Suddenly, the disciples face a new kind of fear, "What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

It's exhilarating to follow Christ when life is going well, prayers are answered quickly, and plans fall into place without a hitch. Who wouldn't want to follow a man who gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and fed thousands at a time – for free? It was exciting to hang-out with Jesus and listen to His parables and His wisdom. No wonder the scribe said, "Jesus, I will follow You wherever you go."

Jesus' answer bursts the bubble of the scribe's fervor, don't you think? "Okay, if you want to follow me you'll have to leave your pillow at home." There's nothing glamorous about following Jesus and He makes that clear right away. Then He invites them onto the boat. I wonder if the scribe accepted, because it's no mistake that the disciples followed Him right into the middle of a storm.

Jesus stirs things up in our lives to remind us that He is God and we are not, and that following Him takes faith not in our great ability or know-how, but in Him the Creator of the wind and the sea. When the difficulties in my life increase and the best of plans and intentions begin to fall apart I'm the first to scream, "Save me Lord! Don't you care that I'm perishing?" I question my purpose, my ability to discern God's call, and I wonder, "Is this really God's will?" or sometimes I wonder, "Is it really worth it to follow Him at all?"

It's in the middle of a storm, whether a "rainstorm" or a "hurricane" that our **core call** is tested and also, worth its weight in gold. It's the storm that refines and sharpens our call and commitment to Christ; and our call is a beacon that keeps us on course when everything else says, "You're perishing!"

My first two years in vocational ministry were nothing like I expected. I thought serving Jesus would be easy, fun, and rewarding. Don't get me wrong – it wasn't all bad; but it was a lot harder than I ever expected. Three of the four girls in my bible study would show up drunk – just to see how I'd react. At one point two of them *pretended* to attempt suicide to get my attention. More often than not, it seemed, I poured my heart and soul into the lives of women on campus only to have them walk away from Christ. My husband, Bob, and I served on a great team, but it wasn't without conflict, which really surprised and often discouraged me. Sometimes after a long day on campus I'd toss a bathroom towel into the hallway, which was a "sign" to Bob that I was "throwing in the towel". I wanted to quit more days than not those first few years. Of course in the midst of it all there were bright spots. Students received Christ and committed their lives to following Him, my faith though stretched was strengthened, and so was my **core call**.

Reflect

So, a wild storm rages while Jesus sleeps. They go to Him and yell, "Save us Lord, we're perishing!" He wakes up and before He does anything He asks the disciples a question "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" Then, with a word, He rebukes the wind and the sea; it becomes perfectly calm. His concern wasn't their ability to navigate the boat, but their faith in Him.

The Lord allows the winds and storms of life to try and test our faith. He allows things that confuse and often don't make sense to teach us to trust Him. Not only does He want us to trust Him, but He also wants us to love Him.

- ❖ Read I Peter 1:6-9. Write it out here so you can see it and analyze what it's saying.
 - Why, according to this passage, are trials (of all shapes and sizes) necessary?
 - Why do you think the proof of your faith is more precious than gold?
 - What is the result of a proven faith (look at I Peter 1:7, 8, and 9)?
 - How have hard things in your life strengthened your faith in Jesus and deepened your love for Him?
 - Describe one particular situation where you experienced a trial that resulted in praise of, love for, and joy in Jesus.

- ❖ When you think about the struggles that come with following Christ, why is it important to have a **core call**?

My friend Don graduated from college and went into the Navy as an officer and served on a destroyer for several years before completing his obligation to the military. Throughout his military service his dream was to become a professor because he wanted to represent Christ and influence students on a secular campus. He endured a lot during his tour with the Navy; then he persevered through several difficult years of graduate school before obtaining his PhD. The one thing that remained constant through the "necessary trials" he encountered was his call to serve the Lord as a professor. Recently he explained that having this focus from God helped to orient his response. In the midst of the trials I often heard him respond by saying, "How am I going to achieve what God called me to be now that I am facing this hard thing?" Rather than, "Oh my gosh, everything is falling to pieces what should I do now?" Today, fourteen years after graduating from college, he is a professor in the school of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of California, Irvine.

Respond

Maybe you're in the midst of wild winds and choppy seas right now. Your circumstances are out of control and it seems like the Lord has diverted all of your plans. It could be that the storm you're experiencing is within – you doubt God's presence and care, or you fear making the wrong decision, or as you count the cost of following Christ you're overwhelmed by the sacrifice.

Perhaps the Lord is showing you that the trial you're facing is a result of sin. You're in a relationship that you know isn't pleasing to the Lord; the job you've said yes to requires ethical compromise; or you're hiding in the shadows because you don't want to acknowledge the Lord's prodding.

- ❖ Whatever the storm's category, take the opportunity to call out to Jesus in faith. Get somewhere alone, clear away all of the static, and lay it all out at His feet. Tell Him that like the disciples in Matthew 8, you're timid and your faith is weak.

- Why do you think it's important to be aware of the hardships that come when you step out in faith?
 - Maybe you're in a storm right now. Write down the stuff that is crashing in on your world. How do you feel, what are your fears?
 - If the Lord is convicting you of sin don't hesitate. Confess your sin, call on Him to give you the will and the power to turn away from whatever it is and follow Him. Cling to the truth of I John 1:9: "If we confess our sin He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- ❖ Reflect back to the first part of the Matthew 8 passage and consider these questions:
- Take inventory of your life and attitude toward Jesus today. Do you relate more to the scribe who was willing to follow Him wherever, or the guy who wanted to take care of life's details first?
 - Pray for a little bit and process your thoughts aloud or write them in your journal. Talk to the Lord about what the commitment to follow means to you.
 - What is Jesus saying to you?

6 : Core Call

My **core call** continued to develop in my heart as Bob and I poured our lives into students at the University of Texas. The more time I spent on campus, the more convinced I became of the importance of winning students to Christ, building them in their faith, and sending them to the world. It motivated me to share this vision with students in our leadership, and this helped to solidify God's call on my heart and life. Then, some close friends paid us a visit and asked us to lead a short-term mission team to, what was then, the Soviet Union. The Berlin Wall had fallen and doors to communist countries swung open. After a lot of prayer and struggling to overcome all kinds of barriers, Bob, myself, and 70 others moved into areas all over the Soviet Union, sharing the gospel with university students there. Our team lived in Moscow; we witnessed the total collapse of communism. We were there when the Soviet flag was lowered and the Russian flag was raised. On campus, students responded to Jesus Christ. We started a church in the city. Although it was a very difficult place to live, we knew we were right where God wanted us. During those difficult years, my **core call** was tested. Was I willing to live in harsh conditions for the sake of the Gospel? So many times I'd lament the frigid temperatures and complete lack of comfort, but praise God for the privilege of being part of such an amazing time in history.

About three years into our time in Russia, I got very sick. We returned to the U.S. for what we thought would be one month. God had other plans for us. Due to the severity of my illness, we ended up in Oregon (where Bob's family lived and all of our "stuff" was stored). We watched one month turn to two, and two quickly became six, and within two years (because of my health) we left staff. It was a confusing turn of events to say the least. Yet, this change of direction was clearly from the Lord. We had absolutely no control over my health or our circumstances. We had to believe the Lord had something else in mind.

For the next ten years I spent the majority of my time at home, in bed. Bob became a pastor at our home church. His wide array of responsibilities included missions and the college ministry. Even though I was unable to work full-time, I continued to disciple students. The weekly gathering of a big group of student women, from all over the city, in my home quickly became my favorite time of the week. In addition to studying the Word and praying, we talked about Win, Build, and Send – how to impact students on campuses all over Portland with the Gospel.

My **core call**, which began to take shape years before, was still fundamental to the choices I made and the way I spent what little energy I had. Logistically, my life had changed, but God’s call remained consistent and true.

Reflect

Last summer, Bob and I spent almost six weeks with a group of nine students on Summer Project in Italy. Every Sunday night we’d squeeze around the kitchen table and talk about God’s call, following the steps I’ve outlined in previous chapters. Over the course of our time together, the seniors on the project worked on, processed, and created their “core call” statements. They come from a variety of backgrounds, but all remain involved in CCC’s leadership on their campuses and will graduate soon. At this point, three of them are seriously considering a short-term STINT with CCC, two plan on teaching school, and one is applying for CCC staff. Here are their **Core Call** statements:

- *Be an Image Bearer of the King, serve on the front lines. Hebrews 12:1-2*
- *Live day-to-day passionately pursuing Christ and tell others about Him. II Timothy 6:13*
- *Be prepared to share the Gospel; Be an Image Bearer and passionately pursue Christ. I Corinthians 9:19-27*
- *Be willing to be uncomfortable for the Gospel. I Thessalonians 1:3-5*
- *Use the gifts He has given me for His glory and obey Him. I Timothy 6:11-12*

During those nights around the kitchen table, sometimes after a huge scoop of gelato we talked about a lot of issues surrounding God’s call. My friends asked all sorts of great questions, some of which I’ve included here because they’re frequently asked. I will provide some answers, but I’m acutely aware of the fact that this process is a spiritual one. It takes time logged with Jesus. Reading His Word and talking and listening to Him in prayer. It takes faith and a willingness to sacrifice our will for His. [Perhaps provide a little more information here about spiritual process. What does this mean or entail? How will we know when we have God’s answers for us?] As I mentioned earlier, God’s call is real and also mystical. It’s different for everyone and yet very similar. In addition to following through with this study I encourage you to discuss these things with your friends and spiritual leaders.

FAQ

- ❖ About half-way through our Sunday night discussions one student realized that his core call was similar to everyone else’s in the group. He asked, “Aren’t all believers called to the same thing? If so, why come up with a **core call**?”

A great question. Yes, we're all called to follow Christ as His ambassadors. We're all "Image Bearers" and called to live for Christ and share the Gospel. Yet, we're all unique individuals particularly gifted by God for His purposes. How *I* live out God's call in my life will be different from how *you* live out His call, because we're different from one another.

❖ *How do I know if I'm following God's call or my own desires?*

First, this is a good question to ask yourself throughout your life. We're all prone to satisfy our own desires. The fight between the flesh and the Spirit is detailed in Scripture and is one we'll fight until we're in the presence of our King.

However, it's this very issue that sits at the heart of an un-surrendered life. Take note that our "own desires" are often masked by what looks like a noble pursuit – like the guy who wanted to first go and bury his father and then follow Jesus (Matthew 8). Often, what seems to us, and to those around us, to be the right thing to do might actually be rooted in a desire to make sure everything's in place before we say "yes" to God's call.

"I'll go wherever God calls me, but not until I get married because it wouldn't be good or safe for me to go alone." The desire to be married isn't wrong unless that desire holds you back from an open-handed and surrendered life.

I encourage you to sort through your desires. How do they compare with God's work in and through your heart and life? Developing faith and trust is a huge part of following Christ. It's a challenge for everyone to trust Him to take care of our every need – emotional, physical, mental, spiritual or social.

Respond

- ❖ Continue to craft your core call – in pencil. Here are a few ideas to help you in the process.
 - You might need to reflect back over this study and refresh your memory. Summarize the insights you've gained from your experiences, the people you interviewed, and God's Word.
 - Try making a list, writing a few sentences, or start with a whole paragraph and then whittle it down to a sentence. Good idea – a lot of times the struggle is to say too much, be too much, rather than erring on the side of simplicity.
 - If you're not particularly good at writing out your thoughts, tell a friend what you're learning and ask him/her to be your scribe and write your thoughts down as you share. This is another great idea! Sometimes having a soundboard can be helpful to anyone!

Remember, ultimately what you're aiming for is a statement, which you can embrace and remember, and, most importantly, expresses *your* core call.

7: Future

As I mentioned earlier, due to my poor health, Bob and I left staff with CCC and Bob became a pastor at our home church. His main focuses were missions and the college ministry – both suited his core call in many ways. Every summer, he was responsible for planning and putting on a huge outdoor picnic. The picnic helped to kick-off the summer and also provided a way for our church members to share the gospel with the surrounding neighborhood. It was always an encouraging day – hundreds of people gathered to worship and spend the afternoon together.

Several years ago, after all of the picnic festivities concluded, Bob had what he calls a “spiritual epiphany.” Earlier that weekend, we learned that the founder and president of CCC, Dr. Bill Bright, had passed away. Dr. Bright’s love for Jesus and life of faith always inspired Bob, and the Lord used his death to challenge Bob in a fresh new way. Throughout the weekend Bob took inventory of his life and examined afresh his purpose and call. Upon returning home after the picnic, he turned on the TV only to find the Public TV channel rebroadcasting an interview with Dr. Bright conducted a year earlier. The interviewer asked Dr. Bright, “How would you like to be remembered?” Dr. Bright’s classic answer: “As a slave of Christ.”

The Lord used that statement, which Bob heard Dr. Bright repeat on many occasions, to pierce his heart. He realized that although he’d been involved in church ministry for ten years, he’d lost his passion for Christ and the Gospel. He was no longer walking by faith, but was comfortable and settled – too comfortable and way too settled.

After wrestling with the Lord, late that same night, Bob wrote a letter of resignation. He spent the next day explaining his decision to the pastors and elders of the church; then, he called me late in the afternoon to tell me what he’d done. On one hand, I was quite surprised (as you can imagine), but on the other hand, I sensed something exciting was about to happen. Just a week before, I’d visited a new doctor who said, “I think I can help you.” I’d waited ten years to hear those words. God was on the move.

The church, graciously, refused to accept Bob’s resignation. Yet, we knew God was preparing us for a change. We waited, prayed, sought counsel from good friends, and listened for the Lord’s direction. In the meantime, my health began to improve slowly and ever so slightly. About nine months later, we were invited to visit a CCC summer project in Lake Tahoe. The students were studying Philippians and using a Bible Study guide that I’d written, so I was asked to speak to the project. We spent several days chatting with and ministering alongside the staff, and also encouraging students in their walks with the Lord. One morning, having coffee and reading our bibles at the base of the “Heavenly” gondola, we discussed our future. Right then and there, our core call flooded back full-force. It was clear: the best place to invest our lives and follow through with God’s call was on the staff of CCC. Four months later, we began raising support. In January of 2005, we joined 100 other New Staff in Daytona Beach, Florida for training. We were the oldest New Staff there, but I think we had the most fun.

My point in sharing this portion of our story is two-fold. First of all, there’s nothing more amazing, frightening, or exhilarating as following Jesus Christ. Second, the Lord uses our core call to guide us throughout our lives. Bob was 53, I was 46, and we’d been married for almost 23 years when we began what we call our “third missionary journey.” Yes, our vocation and location have changed several times over the years; but God’s call upon our lives has only strengthened, matured, become more refined, and much more certain.

Reflect

During my ten years in the “wilderness” of poor health, the Lord helped fulfill my long-time dream of writing Bible Studies. One of my favorite projects was creating a study on the book of Philippians. The Lord led me to write *Living Passionately for Christ* at an especially discouraging point. Throughout my Christian life, it desired to live wholeheartedly for my Savior. My sense of “call” was strong and I wanted my life to count. Yet there I was, sick in bed, unable to “do” much of anything. The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church in Philippi from jail, confined, held prisoner, simply because he was a follower of Christ.

Paul didn’t view his imprisonment as an interruption in his ministry; instead, he used it as an opportunity. He wrote, *“Now I want you to know brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well-known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear”* (Philippians 1:12-14). A few verses later he exposes the true intent of his heart (his core call perhaps): *“...according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:20-21).

- ❖ As you forge ahead in your journey with the Lord, you will face storms, hills and valleys, barriers, temptations, highs and lows. The Lord will use every experience to deepen your love for Him and consequently your desire to follow His call. The decisions you make today will affect your life five, ten, twenty years down the road. Look into the future and describe where you hope to be with the Lord in ten years. I’ve included the following questions to prompt your thinking.
 - How will you choose faith in the midst of sorrow or listen for God’s voice in the midst of confusion?”
 - What steps can you take to follow Christ even when those closest to you disagree?
 - In light of your current circumstances, what does this phrase mean to you: “With all boldness, Christ be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”?

Respond

- ❖ Go back to your **core call** and ponder what you have so far. Remember that you want to keep it “open-ended,” a statement that will apply to your life five, ten, twenty years down the road.
- ❖ I’d encourage you to take some good time with the Lord. Maybe take a Saturday morning and get away from the familiar. Turn off your cell phone, leave the internet at home, and bring just your Bible and journal. Take a look down the road of your life. Process your future and your heart’s desires with the Lord. Read. Listen. Pray. Listen. Surrender. Listen. Follow.

8 : Sacrifice

"And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, "DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER." And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack; go and sell all you possess, and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me." But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property" (Mark 10:17-22).

We learn from the other Gospel accounts that this man was rich, young, and a ruler. So he had a lot of money and status – and we see that he was also curious. Notice, Jesus is setting out on a journey, and this guy *runs* up and kneels before Him. Breathless, he asks, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" I find his question intriguing. He was young and rich, why was he thinking about eternity?

Jesus reminded him of five of the Ten Commandments. The guy's response is surprising, "Teacher, I have kept all of these things from my youth up." You'd expect either Jesus to challenge him on this bold claim of spotless obedience since his youth, or Jesus to commend him for keeping the commands: "Good job, young sir. I'm proud of you for being an upright and moral citizen. Thank you for honoring your parents – they must be so proud." But no, Jesus (who felt a love for this guy) cuts to the quick: "One thing you lack; go and sell all you posses, and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

The King of eternity asks him to give up everything.

"But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property."

Jesus called him to give up his earthly, temporal stuff for the sake of gaining far, far more. I can't help but think about how alluring and appealing the world can be. How often are we distracted, slowed down, taken in and almost taken out by our desire for snazzy cars, elegant homes, or fat bank accounts? Or maybe it's not the extreme possessions we're after. A decent car, a condo, and a modest savings account can keep us just as distracted. Jesus wants first place in our hearts and our lives. He deserves first place because He's our Savior and our God.

I can't help but think about what this man missed because his possessions and property meant more to him than following Christ.

Bob and I, about a year after we got married, decided it was time to start a family. With that one little decision, a journey of faith began. About a year later, after months of waiting, hoping, crying, and questioning, I realized that we might not ever have children. I never considered this before, and I didn't like considering it then very much either. But, by God's grace, I realized I was holding out for something that might not be God's will. One afternoon, after learning, once

again, that I wasn't pregnant, I knelt before the Lord on the red carpet of our first apartment. I cried open my hands and laid my desire for children at His feet: "Lord, even if I never have a baby, I will follow You." That day the Lord led me to Romans 11:33-36, *"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."* For the next several years we endured infertility testing to no avail. Then, while living in Russia, we pursued adoption, but the door was closed. We've always remained open to His direction and leading in this area, but all along the way the Lord's answer has been, "No."

Jesus said, *"Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or mothers or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present again, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life"* (Mark 10:29-30).

By His grace we are peaceful and content today, we've enjoyed a fruitful ministry over the years. And, (as I mentioned earlier,) we continue to win college students to Christ, build them in their faith, and send them to the world. We don't have two or three children of our own, but we do have spiritual children all over the world -- which is a rich blessing. I'm so grateful for the life the Lord Jesus called us to live. It's not at all what I expected...it's so much better.

Reflect

I'm always intrigued by Jesus' response to individuals who expressed a desire to follow Him. Remember in Matthew 8? One guy said, "I'll follow You wherever You go." You'd think Jesus would welcome such a statement. Or, what about the guy who wanted to bury his father, or the one who wanted to say goodbye to his friends? Why didn't Jesus say something like, "Great! We're traveling to such and such city, so by the time you've finished doing what you need to do, come and find us." But, that's not what Jesus said at all. It was all or nothing with Jesus. Listen to His words:

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:24-25).

- ❖ Let's break this down and consider what this means for us.
 - "Let him deny himself." Words like, refuse, renounce, reject are synonyms for *deny*. What does it look like to *deny* yourself? Think about your longings and desires as you reflect on this question.

- "Take up your cross and follow Me." Recently, as I read this statement, I realized that when Jesus said this, He was on His way to the cross, but nobody else knew. So, the people who were listening to His words knew the cross only as a brutal means of torture and death. The same is true for us, but we also realize it's the place where Jesus demonstrated His indescribable love for us. What does it mean to "take up your cross and follow Him?"
- "Whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." Ask yourself, "Am I willing to lose my life for His sake?" Tough question.

Respond

- ❖ I can attest to the fact that God asks us many times throughout our lives to "open our hands" and offer all kinds of things to Him in sacrifice and surrender. What are you afraid of giving back to Him? What is keeping you from wholeheartedly following Him?
 - Go back and read Mark 10:17-30. Pray through portions of this passage that speak to your heart. Perhaps you're afraid of giving up possessions or financial security in order to follow Jesus. Maybe you don't have much now, but you're afraid that if you follow Christ you'll never live in a nice house or drive a decent car. Talk to Him, share your worries and your fears.
 - Now, go back to your **core call**. Up until now you've been using a pencil. Now's the time to write it in pen. First, if you're ready, open your hands. Lay everything out at His feet, all of your dreams and desires, and tell Him you're willing to follow.

Lesson Nine : Your Story

"For you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand*, that you should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Now that we've walked through my story, I want you to think about yours. The Lord chose you, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4), as His workmanship – His masterpiece. He has a purpose and a plan, and He has a story for you to tell. It's my prayer that this guidebook has helped you along the path

As you *Embrace the Journey* I have five final steps for you to consider. My friend, Holly Sheldon, came up with these, and I've found them to be very helpful.

Begin this exercise by re-stating your core call:

VISION:

If you've been involved in ministry on your campus you most likely have served out of a vision for a particular area of campus, or a certain group of people. Maybe you're in a sorority or fraternity, or perhaps you're an RA in a dorm, or you're a certain ethnicity. Your vision has been to reach men and women within that particular area. As you think beyond the university setting, what is your vision? If you're starting a job with an engineering firm, teaching school in an inner-city, or designing brochures for an advertising company, what is your vision for the people you're working with? How do you plan to trust the Lord to use your gifts and abilities in the workplace or ministry?

ONGOING EQUIPPING

Most likely you've received some quality training while on campus, how do you plan to make sure that you continue to grow and develop as a follower of Christ beyond school?

TEAM

My friends and I always say that you can do anything and go anywhere as long as you have a good team. We tend to think of "team" in the context of ministry (if you've been involved in CCC for any length of time). If you're headed into the workplace, build a team. Gather a group of your friends together and develop a vision and plan for a city in your region. Go together, live near one another, create a ministry in your neighborhood, with co-workers; or, start a ministry at a local high school campus.

PLAN

"If we aim at nothing we'll hit it every time." I love that quote! Throughout school you've probably followed a syllabus. You've had clear tracks to run on, you've followed a plan, and now you're graduating. Take the next step and create a "faith plan". Set some goals financially, personally, and in ministry.

RECEIVING PARTNER

Whether you're joining a ministry or going into secular business, develop a vision, plan on ongoing equipping, don't go alone – take a team, create a plan, and partner with a church, an AID organization, or a campus ministry. With a receiving partner you'll have help, accountability, direction, and even more people who share your vision.

Campus Crusade for Christ, in an effort to see Every Student Sent has developed a website: www.allcallings.com. The purpose of this site is to help students like you, who have a vision and desire ongoing equipping to find others who have the same desire. It's our desire to help you connect, wherever you go, into the body of Christ. We want to see you, God's masterpiece, used in His Kingdom wherever He calls you to go and in whatever He calls you to do.

Your journey is just beginning, and it's my prayer that as you live out God's **core call** that you'll write your own story someday – both here and in eternity.

