



# LIFE APPLICATIONS "1 CORINTHIANS"

## Chapter 12

### WHAT IS MY CALLING?

Have you ever wondered, "What is my purpose in life? Is there something specific that I should do with my life?" This question can become particularly important as you complete high school and enter college, preparing to enter the working world in a few short years. What should you do with your life?

Christians understand our life's purpose in terms of our "calling," which refers to God summoning you to a task in life. In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul is clear that he is "called to be an apostle" to the Gentiles (Romans 1:1). He also says that all Christians are called: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"Those passages are interesting," you might reply, but how do I determine my calling?" To answer this, Fr. Thomas Hopko replies that you must first understand two things about God's calling for you.

First, everyone has the same calling. This calling, in the words of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, is "to purity of conscience and life." You are called to be in a transforming relationship with God through which you become a saint (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Peter 1:15; Matthew 5:48). St. John Chrysostom says, "See how often Paul uses the word called!...And he does so not out of longwindedness but out of a desire to remind them of the benefit which calling brings...the adoption, the grace, the peace, the sanctification, etc." Fr. Thomas Hopko expands on this point:

Whatever the Lord may be doing with other people in other places, some things are certain for Christians, and certainly us Orthodox: We can cooperate with God. We can share His holiness. We can become, as the saints themselves teach us, all that God Himself is by His gracious action in our lives. We can become loving, peaceful, joyful, good, wise, true, patient, kind, compassionate, powerful, pure, free, self-determining...or we can refuse to cooperate with God, never find our true selves, and perish.

Secondly, everyone has his or her unique calling. You are called by God to be transformed within a specific set of circumstances in the world. Fr. Thomas explains:

Some will sanctify their lives being married; others will be single. Some will do it in clerical orders, others as lay people. Some will be monastic; most will live in the everyday secular world. Some will work primarily in a physical way, others will work intellectually. Some will be artists, scientists, business people, professionals. Others may have no particular job or profession. And some may be called simply to suffer, while others, in terms of this world, will hardly suffer at all. Some will have many temptations, and will bear heavy burdens because of the sins of the world and their particular inheritance of a fallen, broken, distorted humanity. And some may have to fight destructive memories, imaginations, and passions that seem at times impossible to bear. While others will be greatly blessed by receiving a highly

purified humanity, for which they will especially have to answer before God. For, as Jesus taught, "to whom much is given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). But each person will have his or her own life to sanctify. And each will answer for what he or she has done. In the eyes of God none is better than the other. None is higher or more praiseworthy. But each must find his or her own way, and glorify God through it. This is all, ultimately, that matters. The rest is details.

Everything you do must be in accordance with the calling to salvation: anything that interferes with this calling - perhaps including such things as a desire to be a financial or popular success - must be rejected. While God's will for your life may result in achieving material or popular success, it may not: God's will for many of the saints resulted not in material wealth and popularity, but instead in martyrdom.

St. Paul's life demonstrates a second aspect of God's calling for you: you are called not to focus only on your own salvation, but to be an instrument through which God can pursue His purpose for the world. You may not be called as an apostle to the Gentiles, but God has a plan for the people and world around you in which you play an important role.

How can you determine God's will? How can you identify the work or circumstances in which He wants to achieve His purpose in and through you? Thomas Addington and Stephen Graves, experts on living the Christian Faith in the workplace, give two several helpful suggestions for determining God's specific calling for your life.

First, you should understand what Addington and Graves call your "unique gift mix." God has given you a very specific blend of talents, aptitudes, and interests. Psalm 139:1-3, 13-16 vividly depicts the attention to detail God gives to your personal formation:

O Lord, You have searched me and known me.  
You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.  
You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.  
For You formed my inward parts;  
You covered me in my mother's womb.  
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Marvelous are Your works,  
And that my soul knows very well.  
My frame was not hidden from You,  
When I was made in secret,  
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.  
And in Your book they all were written,  
The days fashioned for me,  
When as yet there were none of them.

Many of the interests and aptitudes you have been given can be used far more successfully in some areas than in others. Therefore, if you are a very artistic, free-spirited person who enjoys spontaneous

creativity, it is unlikely that you are called to serve God in an area that calls for strictly ordered, logical and rationale productivity. Likewise, if you are particularly talented and interested in technical or scientific areas, it is unlikely that you are called to serve God in an unstructured, emotionally based activity.

After you identify your “unique gift mix” which God has given to you, how can you identify the area in which He is calling you to use these gifts? Addington and Graves note four general ways in which God calls people:

- God Calls You Directly By Name: For example, He called Abraham, Moses, and St. Paul directly and personally. While this is very uncommon, it does happen.
- God Places a Desire on Your Heart: Just as the Holy Prophet Nehemiah was called to rebuild the Temple, and Isaiah’s vision of heaven prompted him to prophesy to Israel, God may cause you to feel the responsibility to accomplish a task or meet a need.
- God Arranges Your Path: Just as the Holy Prophet Daniel had no choice but to serve as an administrator to four kings, and King Josiah had no choice but to serve as king, God may simply place you in a situation where my only option is in fact the fulfillment of my calling.
- God Prepares an Attractive Option: God may give you an opportunity that excites me with its potential to do something special, to make an impact on the world, to really be of help or benefit to others.

There are several things of which you should be aware when attempting to discern an area to which God may be calling you. First, you should be patient: if you attempt to “make God hurry” to reveal His calling to you, or make a decision without considering His calling, you may make a terrible decision. Second, you should not make the decision alone: your parents, priest, and school counselors can provide an objective assessment of your unique gift mix that may be impossible for you to develop. Third, you must learn to be content in your current life situation, as Fr. Thomas teaches,

We have all heard people say that if only they lived in another place, or in another time, or with other people ... then they could be holy. Or, if only they were married. Or, if only they were not married. If only this, and if only that! We must come to see how sinful such an attitude is, how crazy and deluded. It is simply blasphemy... God has made us who we are. He has put us where we are, even when it is our own self-will that has moved us. He has given us our time and our place. He has given us our specific destiny. We must come to the point when we do not merely resign ourselves to these realities, but when we love them, bless them, give thanks to God for them as the conditions for our self-fulfillment as persons, the means to our sanctity and salvation.

Finally, attempting to discern God’s calling must be made within your relationship with God. You can only accurately know what God wants from you if you regularly and faithfully pray to Him, receive Holy Communion, read Holy Scripture, and confess your sins. If you focus on yourself rather than Him, you will not see clearly how God is calling you to grow in your relationship with Him and others.