

LEAD Conference 2022
Callings in Childhood: How to Help Children Grow in Their
God-Given Callings
Dr. Jesse Joyner

My Story:

From Phoenixville to Bethlehem

Your Story:

1. Think about your own calling story for a moment, whether you first heard whispers of your calling in childhood or not.
2. Pair up with a partner and interview one another with these questions:
 - a. Share about an adult who played an impactful role in your life when you were a child. What was it about their approach to relating to you that made it an impactful relationship?
 - b. How and when were you called to your current vocation? When you think back to your childhood, do you see any whispers of your calling in your childhood years? What did that look like?
3. Now a few people share with the whole group (either for yourself or your partner).

What are Callings?

1. I'm using a broad definition of calling. I believe callings extend beyond the pastors and missionaries (though those are great callings too). But callings can be expressed through teaching, firefighting, trash collecting, street sweeping, singing opera, doing graphic design, making music, planting gardens, raising children, caretaking for an elderly person, and even going to school. In fact, in terms of children and their callings, children are called to play, learn, build relationships, discover the world around them, navigate problems and struggles, and more.
2. Ultimately, calling for Christians is to "wholly belong to Jesus Christ" (Bonhoeffer). But the Bible is filled with a variety of definitions of calling, depending on the story and context you're looking at. Calling is varied in Scripture, often based on one's gifts and particular context/experience. Look at 1 Peter 4:10.

Can children be called?

YES! In my research, I found that many people are impacted in childhood in powerful ways that pave the path for their callings in life (whether they understand those experiences to be calling experiences in childhood or not).

How can we help children grow in their God-given callings?

1. **Everyone** - Believe and teach that callings are for all ages (1 Samuel 3).
2. **Process** - Remind them that calling is a journey (Phil 3:14 - press on towards the goal).
3. **Affirm** - Be an agent of vocation (Jesus calling out Peter, Samuel calling out David, Elizabeth calling out Mary - Luke 1:39-45); see *Holy Fools* p. 218; story of Welcome with the puppet on the train; don't tell them what their callings are, affirm what God is already telling them.
4. **Bible** - Teach the calling stories of the Bible (Adam/Eve, Moses, Noah, Abraham, Samuel, David, Jonah, Esther, Mary, Paul, Peter, Isaiah, the bread/fish kid, etc.). What other calling stories in the Bible can you think of?
5. **Resources** - Provide them with the tools, learning experiences, funding, opportunities, networking, apprenticeships, and mentoring that can nurture their God-given callings.
6. **Gifts** - Teach about the giftings of the Spirit; teach about talents, personalities, and the uniqueness they each bring to the world. "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (Frederick Buechner).
7. **Community** - Surround them with trusted adults, loving/caring people who can and will speak into them, help them, and support them in their callings.
8. **Struggle** - God might not call us out of/away from struggles, but rather call us *through* them and in some cases redeem our struggles into a central element of our callings. See *Holy Fools* pp. 124-129 (story of Daurel in particular).
9. **Sacred Offering** - Remind children that their gifts, talents, and callings are ultimately meant to be an offering of worship unto the Lord. Secondly, those callings serve others in the world as well as provide personal joy and satisfaction within ourselves as we live out our God-given callings in the world. Colossians 3:17 and Romans 11:36.

Further Reading:

Cahalan, Kathleen A., and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore eds. 2017. *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation Throughout Life's Seasons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

DePaola, Tomie. 1978. *The Clown of God*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace and Company.

Dik, Bryan J. 2020. *Redeeming Work: A Guide to Discovering God's Calling for Your Career*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.

Joyner, Jesse. 2021. "Holy Fools": Exploring the Journey of Calling for Christian Variety Performers. PhD Dissertation. Trinity International University. ProQuest.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2622316783/74D2F35035A24815PQ/1>.

Sherman, Amy. 2011. *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Volf, Miroslav. 1991. *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.