

When God Calls Kids

Helping Kids Discern and Grow in Their Callings

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Kidz Matter Conference 2024

Breakout #10

Thurs, Sept 26th, 12:30pm

Locust D

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). This is our “general” calling as Christians (universally the same for all believers). 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.
3. But there are also “specific” callings, which are the varied jobs, roles, careers, vocations, missions, and tasks that God calls us to in life, which can be different from person to person. These can also change and shift over the course of our lives and there can be multiple callings at the same time.

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). In the Bible, we see children or young people being called/appointed in some way, such as Samuel (1 Sam 3), Mary (Luke 1:26-38), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), Isaiah (Is 49:1) and others (which Biblical stories of children being called come to your mind?).

Allow me to share a few examples from my research.... (“Holy Fools” examples of childhood experiences - gifts, agents of vocation, “don’t you ever lose that”, etc).

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

- **Everyone** - Believe and teach that callings are for all ages (1 Samuel 3).
- **Process** - Remind them that calling is a journey (Phil 3:14 - press on towards the goal).
- **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.
- **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.). In my research, I found

that adult Christians looked to Biblical stories of calling as models for their own calling experiences. They saw themselves in the roles of the Biblical characters in their calling narratives. What other calling stories in the Bible can you think of?

- **Resources** - Provide them with the tools, learning experiences, funding, opportunities, networking, apprenticeships, and mentoring that can nurture their God-given callings.
- **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).
- **Community** - Surround them with trusted adults, loving/caring people who can and will speak into them, help them, and support them in their callings.
- **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).
- **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.

Finding Ourselves in God’s Story

Jesus found himself in God’s story (John 3 and Numbers 21). Where do we find ourselves in God’s story? Who do we each relate to the most in the Bible? Why? How can we help kids identify with different people in the Bible? What is that important?

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.

Grownups who found their callings during childhood

The following is an excerpt from my PhD dissertation, “Holy Fools”.... ([see full dissertation](#))

Formative Childhood Years

One particular demographic-related thread that stood out was the stage of life in which many of the participants were first introduced to their vocational crafts. Half of the participants were either inspired towards the variety arts or otherwise learned a variety art in their elementary or middle school years (about the ages of 7-12). Two of the participants were born into a performing family (Oriol, Rene). One participant started learning his main variety art at the age of 40 (Jacob). Some of the participants who learned their art as children also started performing shows as children (Giovanni, Pequele, Bosco, Rene). Some participants were introduced to their craft by way of a birthday or Christmas gift (Barnabas, Bosco, Nick). Bosco explains how he felt an innate motivation to be a ventriloquist from a very young age. First, he makes a key point that I will go into further below, “God just put that in my personality in who I am.” Then he recounts when he first saw a ventriloquist doll at the age of five:

I can still remember very clearly looking up onto the mantel at my friend’s house, and there sat a Danny O’Day ventriloquist doll. And, yeah, kids are intrigued by that. But... it was like pure magic to me. And he pulled it down. And I was just like, ‘I had to have one.’

He asked for a ventriloquist doll for his birthday and got a Charlie McCarthy doll and a record album of training tips from Jimmy Nelson (the ventriloquist behind Danny O’Day). He goes on to casually observe another common experience that I also found among the participants: that of loving the craft so much that he would perform for whomever would watch: “I learned ventriloquism and started performing when I was about eight or nine, you know, ten years old. And that was for of course, you know, whoever would have me.” I will explore that idea later in this chapter.

When Pietro was twelve years old, he was compelled through the pages of a book: “I got into magic when I was twelve years old. I read a book about Harry Houdini. And in all honesty, there was just something about his story that resonated with me. And I said, ‘That’s what I’m supposed to do.’”

Beginning the Journey

The participants of this study overwhelmingly fit the definition of neo-classical calling, understanding their callings as coming from God as a “transcendent summons” (Marsh and Dik 2020,

1-2). Furthermore, many participants started their calling journeys at a young age. This type of experience is affirmed by Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory. His idea that individuals are cultivated in the context of social structures fits with the calling narratives of these participants. If you recall, the participants that started at young ages did so because they were either born into a performing family or close family/friends exposed them to the variety arts during childhood. Imagine if Rene would have been born into a family of farmers in Iowa. He may have had good balance and a strong work ethic. But he may not have had the same opportunities to get up on a high wire and learn how to perform in the circus ring. Miller-McLemore devotes an entire chapter to the understanding of vocation in childhood in *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation Throughout Life's Seasons* (2017). She argues that "children engage vocation as children." (42). She goes on to write that children are at a unique stage of life where they express and discern vocation through "working, playing, learning, and loving" (50). And all of this happens in the critical context of family and community (54-58). Later in that same compilation, Turpin adds that adolescence is a time where youth "begin to practice social roles in order to discover their capacities to contribute to the social world." She then makes the case for how young people are at a critical time for entering the stories of their callings in life: "Through experimentation with possible selves, development of friendships and romantic relationships, experiences of suffering, and navigating cultural stories and school, adolescents begin to author their stories of vocation" (2017, 75).