 God’s Call

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2 Peter 1:10-11: “*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

Romans 11:29 : “*for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable*.”

Christian identity comes from God’s calling. When we are in the darkness, we do not know who we are and where we are going. However, after leaving the darkness and staying in the light of Jesus, we then know who ourselves are and where we are now. Once we find our true selves, we soon want to know our obligations. We want to live a meaningful and valuable life, especially one that pleases God. Our relationship with God starts from this point. If you are still waiting for God’s call or if you want to confirm it, my testimonial message may help you discern God’s call and confirm it.

There is a well-known song, “*Who Am I*?”  sung by the band Casting Crown. “*Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name? Would care to feel my hurt*…” Just like this song, “Who am I”, “Why am I alive?” “What is the central purpose for my life?” are questions that have been constantly asked from generation to generation. Truly, life seems too short to get answers and too complicated to understand. As St. Augustine said in his book, *Confessions*, “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.” Indeed, all these questions are answered, and our final resting place is found when we meet Jesus Christ personally.

Fyodor Dostoevsky said in his book “*The Brothers Karamazov*” “For the secret of man’s being is not only to live…but to live for something definite (eternal)” He meant that man was created not for only eating and drinking, but for doing something meaningful, truthful, and eternal. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, “*He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart.*” This is the reason why Jesus said to his followers, “*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life*.” (Jn 6:27) Before I thought about myself and considered the purpose and meaning of life, I was a happy-go-lucky boy. I grew up with hardworking and responsible parents in a small town in Korea. At that time, I was gifted in art and excited about playing soccer, so it seemed like there were no problems in my childhood as it lacked any life-threatening challenges. However, after my father’s business went bankrupt, I began to worry about my future and pondered the direction of my life. Because I was an honor student in high school, I was hired by the LG company in Korea. I had a chance to stabilize my life in early youth with a secure job while receiving good pay, which was enough to enjoy the rest of my life. However, I could not ignore my desire to improve the quality of my life, instead of remaining complacent in my current situation. I started to believe that life is not just meant for eating, drinking, and having fun with my salary, but that it is more valuable, meaningful, and eternal. As Dostoevsky says, “is not only to live…but to live for something eternal.”, I began to seek something truthful and meaningful, which really satisfies my soul.

After fulfilling the mandatory two years of work in the company, I quit the job and enrolled at HongIk Art college in Seoul, Korea. I chose to study fine art because being an artist looked like the most noble and meaningful life to me after reading the book, “*The Moon and Sixpence*”, written by William Somerset Maugham. In this book, a professional banker named Mark Strickland had quit his job and moved to a remote island, where he started drawing and painting, producing many artworks. Finally, his life ended due to an illness he received on the island. I was so impressed by his dedicated and truth-seeking life. I wanted to live like that novel’s main character. Of course, I expected my choice to be proven right by this world. However, things didn't go as well as I expected. My life in art college was the continuation of my inferiority complex along with feelings of jealousy, frustration, and confusion. Before I entered art school, I enjoyed drawing and painting out of my amusement. I expressed my joy, sadness, loneliness, and love in my papers and on the canvas. However, the curriculum of art college choked me and drew me into the corner until I hated art. Art took away the joy in me. I was confused, lost, and I didn’t know what to do. I just lived as my fleshly desires took me to places such as drinking, dating, partying, and wandering. I was like the ‘Nowhere Man’ that the Beatles sang about. “*He’s a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land…Doesn’t have a point of view, knows not where he is going to*…”

While I was still working at LG, I was invited to a church by my friend. I followed him every Sunday and joined worship services. There, I felt welcomed, valued, and committed. However, I didn’t have any spiritual experiences that I expected. I was just a nominal Christian and church-goer. I had to quit my work in order to fulfill my duty in the military. Two and half years of army life grew long enough to test my faith. My nominal Christian life was devastated by the toughness of military training, the ungodly bootcamp atmosphere, and a frequent drinking habit. I didn’t make any progress in pursuing happiness and in finding the meaning of life.

After being discharged from the army, I returned to school. I expected a better time in school with a new attitude towards my life. To my disappointment, my life didn’t get better, but it got worse. My heavy smoking and drinking ruined my health, reaching the point where I was forced to quit school for medical treatment. I contracted tuberculosis. While lying down at home for treatment, the fear of death enveloped me like a dark cloud. I was not sure of my salvation even though I went to church. The nightmare of torture in the burning fires of hell terrified me every night. I was desperate to find a savior, as I needed the assurance of salvation for my afterlife.

Os Guinness, a Christians theologian and best-selling author, in his book “*The Call*”, quoted a letter from Vaclav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, *“the secret of man is the secret of his responsibility*” (p 18). Guinness meant that men would begin to question themselves, who they are, for whom and why they exist, to where they go, and when they feel responsible for their lives. Indeed, I was living without any sense of responsibility for my life before my health started deteriorating and I feared judgment. I came to realize that my life will be judged and that I would be held accountable for my actions while living on this earth. Some people say that death is the end of everything and that there is nothing after death, but it sounds foolish to me as someone who had walked through the valley of death.

Jeremiah 29:14 says, “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*”  Proverbs 8:17 also says, “*I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.*” Searching for the answer to what is the purpose and the meaning of life starts with self-realization—that I cannot do anything and that I know nothing. It was similar to the prodigal son, who came back to his senses after hitting the bottom of a pig’s pen. Even though the son had left his father’s house, seeking success and freedom, he squandered his life in the distant country and starved to death in a den of pigs. He said, “*How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*” (Lk 15:17-18) The effort to find answers has been made for generations, through thinkers, philosophers, teachers, scientists, and so on. However, no one gave us clear answers and solutions. To our surprise, the answer is simple. We find them when we are found in Him. We find as we are found. The son found himself after being found by his father. The son came to realize that he was unworthy of being called a son, but his father accepted him, lavishing his love on his son. His father said, “*We have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found*.” (Lk 15:32)

In the first week of the new year, 1985, I went up to a mountain near Seoul alone to find answers. Who am I? Why do I live? Where am I going? With the Bible and several philosophy books, I stayed in a prayer house on the top of the mountain for three full days. I went into deep meditation, waiting for sudden spiritual enlightenment. I struggled to forget all desires in order to purify myself as the Buddha taught. I wanted to hear the voice from my inner self, the voice of truth which comes from my conscience as Socrates said. I was waiting for three days, seeking and waiting for something miraculous to happen to me. But nothing happened. I could not get any answer, but I fell deeper into confusion. I heard nothing but barking from a dog under the mountain. While standing against the wall of reality, I cried. I became crazy, like a demon-possessed man who cried out while living in a tomb. In the end, I learned a very important lesson after the three-day journey. The lesson is that I know nothing, that I cannot find an answer for myself. I needed the mercy of God. I needed a savior who reached out his hand to lift me up from the valley of death. I needed to be found.  What Os Guinness said is true: “*All is grace. The secret of seeking is not in our human ascent to God, but in God’s descent to us. We start our searching, but we end up being discovered. We think we are looking for something, we realize we are found by someone*.” (p.14)

I was invited to the UBF summer Bible conference that year in 1985. I followed all the programs for three full days. I longed for the answer and kept searching, but nothing new happened to me. Still, my desire to experience something special, spiritual, supernatural, didn’t change. When I was running out of patience, I made up my mind to leave the conference if I didn’t experience anything special the following day. On the night of the third day while I was singing a hymn, suddenly my heart started burning, catching on fire. It was as if I was in flames. That was the moment of conversion by the work of the Holy Spirit. The mixed feelings combined both resentment for my sins, ignorance, selfishness, lust, rebellion, and the excitement of renewal producing endless tears. Guilt, shame, gratitude, joy overflowed my heart like a river, as if my heart had wings of freedom. Jesus’ question to Peter echoed in my ears, “*Who do you say I am*”. (Mk 8:29) I could not but I confessed, “*You are the Messiah!*” I believe that Jesus is the Messiah who came to save me and die for me. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. (Jn 14:6) I became a new creation when I found myself in Jesus. I was lost, but now I am found. I was blind, but now I can see!

The following day, the last day of the conference, Jesus asked me the same question that he did to Peter. “*Do you truly love me more than these*? “If the question, "*Who do you say I am*?” was an existential question, the question “*Do you love me*?” was a missional question to me. The question “*Who do you say I am*?” was the same question as “*Who are you*?”  I was nothing but a poor man who got lost, confused, and scared like the prodigal son who starved to death. I found myself as a sinner before God through the question. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, when the son came back to his senses, meaning that he found himself before God and his father, he desired to go back home. He desired to return to where he belonged. We call this the ‘Innate desire to return home’. Everyone who was converted desires a belonging with God. As the son longed for returning to his father’s house, we also long for turning to God. As the son missed the peaceful and abundant life in his father’s home, we also miss the refreshing, fulfilling, and peaceful life in the kingdom of God.

When the son decided to return home, he said, “*I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So, he got up and went to his father*.” (Lk 15:19-20) The son felt responsible to do something worthy, valuable for his father as the expression of his gratitude no matter how costly it was. As a result, he did not mind being hired as one of his father’s servants. His decision did not come from a compulsive sense of obligation, but an expression of his gratitude. When I came back to my senses, I was seeking a direction for the next step. I decided to do whatever God calls me to do. I wanted to please God through my obedience. Jesus asked me the same question which he did to Simon Peter at the Sea of Galilee. “Paul, do you truly love me more than these?” I answered as Peter did, “Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.” Jesus answered, “*Feed my lambs*!” (Jn 21:15) Jesus meant that if I love him, I must feed his sheep. My obedience does not come from obligation, but from appreciation. Since then, feeding Jesus’ sheep has become my direction in life. I have accepted that God called me to feed his sheep throughout my life. This is why I am here now.

Os Guinness said to the reader in his book "The Call”, “*Do what you are*.” He meant that God calls us to do as who we are now. He describes it as, “*everyone, everywhere, everything*.” God calls everyone he chooses, any place he decides, and everything for his purpose. We must respond to God’s call and do His work as who we are now, as teachers, students, office workers, computer programmers, nurses, plumbers, and other careers. God can choose anyone He likes, wherever they are, and use His giftedness and every ability for His purpose. This reminds us of Andrew, one of the Twelve, who brought five loaves of bread and two fish to Jesus for five thousand people. Five loaves of bread and two fish are nothing for a crowd of five thousand. It is not enough for a single person’s lunch. However, Andrew’s faith was accepted, valued, and blessed as Jesus performed a miracle by feeding the five thousand. Andrew started with where he was and what he could do. He did what he was. God calls us to do what we are and asks us to bring what we have. A quote that I like comes from Mother Teressa, where she said “God does not call us to do great things, but to do small things with great love.”

For those who are still conflicted between serving the campus ministry or other missions, I want to join in with my words, “Start where you are!” The place where we are converted is your mission field, your parish, and a startup for God’s call. If you met Jesus during your years in college, serve college students as shepherds. If you experienced something special, sacred, and fitting, devote yourself to where you started. In John 4, Jesus met a Samaritan woman who came to draw water. When she found Jesus as the Messiah, she left her water jar and went to her town, saying, “*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah*?” (Jn 4:29). My art college was my first mission-field. Right after the conference was over, I went back to my school and preached the gospel. I testified how Jesus saved me and changed my life as he did the Samaritan woman. All of my classmates were shocked. They would not believe me because I used to be a ring leader for drinking parties and all kinds of ungodly activities. Some began to mock me. Despite this, I was more enthusiastic and dedicated to serve the Lord on campus. You don’t need to search for the place you serve the Lord. Do not waste your time and energy. The place where you are now is your mission-field. The location where we were born again is your harvest field. Start from there and respond to God’s call.

Jeff Iorg, pastor and president of Gateway Seminary, in his book "*Is God Calling Me*?” categorized God’s call into three types: a universal call to Christian service and growth, a general call to ministry leadership, and special call to ministry assignment. Os Guinness divides the same category in two: the primary call, which is generally understood for conversion, and the second call, for God’s mission. The primary call and the secondary call may come together almost simultaneously as it happened to me, and they also come separately in order. God called Abraham twice. His first call was when Abraham was in Ur of Chaldean (Ge 11:31, Ac 7:2,). God wanted Abraham to leave from his father Terah’s idolatrous influence (Jos 24:2). God’s second call came when Abraham was in Haran (Ge 12:1). God commanded Abraham to leave his father’s household and his country, arriving at the land that God showed him. Abraham obeyed and went by faith even though he did not know where he was going. (He 11:8) God’s second call to Abraham was special to God’s redemptive purpose and will for world salvation. Paul the Apostle also said in Romans 1:5, “*Through him we receive grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake*.”  Paul describes God’s call with two words: Grace and apostleship.

God used me for a campus mission in my art college for 5 years and sent me to America as a missionary right after starting a family with missionary Mary Choi, who came from Northridge UBF in LA. It was the summer of 1989. After 5 years as a missionary in Northridge, God sent my family to Chicago UBF where Dr. Samuel Lee was. I wondered about God's call and His direction for my missionary life. My primary mission field was Germany because I wanted to study aesthetics, the philosophy of beauty, since Germany is the birthplace of modern philosophy. Instead, God sent a woman from America who guided me to the USA. I wanted to pioneer in San Francisco after my missionary life in LA, but God sent my family to Chicago. Through these events, God taught me an attitude toward God’s call, which is obedience. What God wanted me to do for his work is a matter of submission, not ambition. I died with Christ when I was baptized by the Holy Spirit. I am no longer myself, but Christ’s. My life, my plan, my future belongs to the Lord Jesus, and not me because I died with Christ and became a new creation for him.

Even though I obeyed God’s direction and came to Chicago, I was still conflicted between two paths for my future. The first path is to live as a full-time minister. The second path is to live as a lay minister, a so-called self-supporting missionary. In the midst of heavily demanding life as a young missionary in Chicago UBF, I took several classes for art. I had a hidden desire and ambition to become a professor-shepherd for an art school in the USA. In fact, with the help of an art professor, I opened the first solo exhibition for my art school in Chicago. Conflict arose within my heart between being a full-time shepherd and part time self-supporting missionary. In the winter of 1997, four years later, I had moved to Chicago and God visited me with Isaiah 40:6-8, “*All people are like grass, and all their glory (faithfulness) is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall…but the word of our God endures forever*.” Through these words, God sanctified me from the remaining desire for worldly glory and helped me make a decision to completely devote myself to the work of the Lord as a full-time minister and messenger.

In Dr. Samuel Lee’s Spiritual Legacy, there is “World mission through Lay-missionaries” next to ‘Go back to the Bible’. The world mission is the culmination of Jesus’ teaching and ministry. At the end of each gospel, Jesus’ world mission command is written (Mt 28:18-20, Mk 16:15, Lk 24:47, Jn 21:15). We cannot think of the gospel apart from the world mission. Those who accept the gospel carry out a world mission as Jesus commanded us. The UBF ministry prays for the world mission through lay-missionaries. Who are lay-missionaries and who are full-time shepherds in the UBF ministry? As for me, I decided to devote my whole heart to being a full-time shepherd. This does not mean that I avoid any responsibility for my family, but to only do the work of God such as fishing and teaching. This world classifies full time from part time based on the amount of hours one spends for work. Of course, we can produce better results when we spend more time, but it does not always go this way.

Full-time and part time is not a matter of spending hours, but a matter of commitment to God’s call. Apostle Paul worked as a tent-maker while he was preaching the gospel. Was he a full-time shepherd or a part-time lay-missionary? I believe that Paul was a full time lay-missionary. Paul worked hard day and night as a tent-maker to support his ministry. He had the right to receive financial support from the churches he had planted. He said this in his letters to the Corinthian Church and the Thessalonian Church (1 Co 9:14-15, 2 Co 11:9, 2 Thes 3:7).         Here, he chose to work in order to give a good example to the people of the church. Even though I decided to dedicate my life completely to the work of the Lord, I still worked as a handyman and a landlord in St. Louis. I didn’t get paid from my ministry for a living, but offered to support the ministry and family instead. Even though I still work as a lay-missionary, I believe that I am working as a full-time minister. I am not ashamed of myself to be called a ‘missionary’ or ‘pastor’. In fact, I am preaching the gospel and raising disciples from college students. I am also pasturing now even though it is a house or home church.

In Greek the word church has two main meanings: *koinonia* and *ecclesia*. *Koinonia* means fellowship and *ecclesia* means ‘called out.’ A church is where those who are called out by God gather, worship, and have fellowship in Christ. Therefore, the UBF ministry is a church where those who believe in Jesus Christ and those who are called out for world campus missions, share God’s spiritual blessing and have fellowship while sharing the same spiritual heritage. In fact, the UBF started as a para-church. Here, a para-church is differentiated from local churches. According to Os Guinness, a para-church is described as a voluntary association and local churches as institutional corporations (P.95).  Like the meaning of the word ‘*para*’ (side) in Greek, *para*-churches started to support local churches and follow up on what local churches miss. In respect of the ‘kingdom mindset’, para-churches and local churches are not situated in competition, but in cooperation. Ironically, the UBF started with both the nature of a para-church and the local churches from the beginning. Unlike other para-church ministries like the IVF and CCC, the UBF started with the nature and form of a local church. We have had our own worship service and discipleship program, whereas other para-church ministries sent their members to their own local churches on Sunday. UBF has its own unique way of ministry with its own spiritual legacy. It produces its own full-time shepherds and pastors who get paid from the HQ or their own ministry. Some went to seminaries and got degrees and were ordained. Others continue to serve campus missions without gaining any degrees.

In conclusion, Christian identity comes from God’s call, and for what and where we are called is important. Whether we are called as a full time Bible teacher or pastor, or part time lay-missionary, it is important to remember the grace of salvation and the personal and specific mission that is given by God. Anyone can be called by God if they are ready to respond to his call. We must believe that God’s call and our gift are irrevocable. God does not make mistakes. In all things, he works for good and what is beautiful for those who love him and are called for his good purpose (Ro 8:28). Whether you serve the Lord on campus or in seminary, hospital, or home, it is important for us to work and serve with the attitude of ‘being called.’ God wants us to be faithful and devoted to him where we are now.

1. What is God’s call? (definition):

* A call is a profound impression from God that establishes parameters for your life and can be altered only by a subsequent, superseding impression from God.

(Jeff Iorg)

* Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.

 (Os Guinness)

* God’s call is his sovereign choice and divine invitation to his special purpose, specifically and especially the work of redemption.

1. Types of God’s call:

* A universal call to Christian Service and Growth (Eph 4:1-3, 1 Pe 1:15)
* A general call to Ministry Leadership (Lk 5:1-11)
* A special call to Ministry Assignment

{[( YOUR LIFE)]}

 (Jeff Iorg)

* Primary call: (Ge 11:31, Jos 24:2)
* Secondary call: (Ge 12:1, Ro 1:15)

(Os Guinness)

* General call: marriage, job, ministry position etc
* Special call: related to mission, especially for redemptive work

1. What is the nature of God’s call?

* Initiative (Sovereign): God calls us first. (Jn 15:16)
* Redemptive: God calls us for his redemptive work. (1 Pe 2:9-10)
* Responsive: God’s call creates a relationship.( relational, not forceful)
* Irrevocable: God’s call cannot be revoked. ( Ro 11:29, 8:28)
* Personal (Individual) : God calls each of us personally (Jn 21:22, Ac 9)
* Providential: God plans in advance before he calls us. (Eph 2:10)
* Sacrificial: God’s call requires my obedience. (Mk 8:34)
* Rewarding (Fruitful): My obedience is rewarded. (Ge 12:3, 1 Pe 2:9)

1. How does God call us?

* God calls through Sudden and Dramatic Experiences (Lk 5:1-11, Ac 9)
* God calls through Reasoned Decisions (Ac 16:6-10)
* God calls through the Prompting of Others (1 Sa 16, Ac 13:2)

(Jeff Iorg)

* Direct call: God himself appeared and called in person:  Ab, Moses, Paul
* Through the Holy Spirit: Philip (Ac 8:9) Barnabas & Paul (Ac 13:2)
* Through the Scripture: Martin Luther (Ro 1:17),David Livingstone (Mt 28:19-20)
* Through people: Pastor, spiritual mentor, friend, family
* Through events: Paul (Ac 9)

1. Who does God call?

* God calls Unexpected People
* God calls Immoral People (Ge 38, Josh 2, 2 Sa 11)
* God calls Anonymous People (Mk 3:13-14)
* God calls Inconsistent People (Ge 22, 2 Sa 11)

(Jeff Iorg)

1. Why does God call us? :

* For his glory and goodness (Ge 12:3, 2 Pe 1:3)-redemptive work
* For spiritual growth: Ge 3:9 (Adam), Ro 13:12-14 (St. Augustine)
* For Christian service: preacher, musician, organizer, maintenance
* For missional work or leadership positions: pastor, missionary, Bible teacher, youth group leader, etc.

1. How do we discern God’s call?

* Inner Peace (Phil 4:7)
* Confirmed by Others
* Effectiveness in Ministry
* Joy in the Ministry
* Realistic Expectations about Ministry (Jeff Iorg)
* Conviction through the Holy Spirit: Conversion, Impression
* Event (happening) or vision
* Advice by people
* Fruit of decision

1. The Effects of God’s Call

* God’s Call Gives You Confidence (Ps 23, Is 41:10, Mt 28:20, Jn 14:18)
* God’s Call Strengthens Perseverance (Ro 5:3,4, 1 Pe 4:13)
* God’s Call Infuses Appropriate Authority
* God’s Call Leads to Humility (1 Co 4:7)

1. Examples of God’s Call in the Bible

* God’s Call to Adam (Ge 3:9)
* God’s Call to Abraham (Ge 12:1-3)
* God’s Call to Moses (Ex 3:4, 15-22)
* God’s Call to Gideon (Jdg 6:12)
* God’s Call to Samuel (1 Sa 3:4)
* God’s Call to David (1 Sa 16:12-13)
* God’s Call to Isaiah (Is 6:8)
* God’s Call to Jeremiah (Jer 1:2)
* God’s Call to Jonah (Jnh 1:1-2)
* God’s Call to Mary (Lk 1:28)
* God’s Call to 12 disciples (Lk 5:10, 27, Jn 1:39, 43,47)
* God’s Call to Paul (Ac 9)

1. A kingdom of Priests & A Holy Nation

* Exodus 19:5,6– Israelites
* Deuteronomy 7:6: The second generation of the Israelites
* 1 Peter 2:9–    Scattered Christians (Jews & Gentiles)
* Rev 1:6:--All Redeemed people by the blood of Jesus