

Section Three

Spiritual Formation: Hearing God's Call

SYLLABUS

DESCRIPTION:

Understanding God's "calling" is foundational to spiritual formation for ministry. God's call is unique for each person since God has designed each one with a different combination of talent, ability and temperament while empowered by the Holy Spirit. This format is a self-discovery process that will help you identify your call and develop a plan to fulfill that call.

OBJECTIVES:

Upon successful completion of this session you will be able to:

- Explain the concept of calling and be able to differentiate calling from gifting, ministry and vocation.
- Understand how to discover one's call.
- Explain some of the obstacles or roadblocks to discovering calling.
- Analyze some of the considerations one should work through before ministering from one's call.
- Appreciate the diversity of calling and the uniqueness of the design for each individual.
- Develop plans to fulfill calling as seasons in one's life change, including consideration for further training, developing necessary competencies and honing one's talent.
- Have confidence you are ministering in God's pleasure.
- Determine you life's overall goal.

FORMAT:

Classes should meet for one hour and ten minutes weekly for twelve sessions. These classes are a time for God-guided self-discovery in a small peer group setting. Reading and study questions should be assigned each week for the following week (see schedule of assignments). Students will be formed into small cohorts which are self-led groups where they will share their study with one another and discuss what they are learning about their unique calling. Cohort leaders should be present to guide the cohorts, encourage the spiritual tone of the session, give brief definition of terms and assignments, and manage the cohorts.

TEXTS:

- Blackaby, Henry T. *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003. 89 pages.
- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Selfless way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007. 96 pages.
- *Women in Ministry Leadership (A Summary of the Biblical Position of the Foursquare Church Concerning God's Grace and a Woman's Potential Under His Sovereignty and Call)*. Edited by Steve Schell, et al, 2nd ed., Foursquare Media, 2021. 64 pages. <https://the-foursquare-church.myshopify.com/products/women-in-ministry-leadership>
- Bengé, Janet, and Geoff Bengé. *Christian Heroes, Then and Now*. 50-book Series. Seattle, WA: YWAM Pub, 1998-2017.

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

There are four texts assigned, but one of the four books will be one choice from the *Christian Heroes, Then and Now* biographical series. A one-page, double-spaced response report is required on each of the four assigned texts and should be submitted to the cohort leader in charge.

It is best to read all the assigned books early in the course to maximize their helpfulness through this process of reflection. However, all reading must be completed before the session ends and response reports submitted.

REFLECTION PROJECTS:

A student will prepare for cohort reflections in three personal areas:

1. Your spiritual history,
2. What God has said to you, and
3. Your spiritual plan.

For details of these reflection projects see *Hearing God's Call: A God-guided Self-discovery* by Steve Schell.

CONSIDERATIONS

CALLING AND GIFTING:

The subject of “calling” has often been misunderstood. It’s frequently assumed a person’s call is determined by aptitudes or natural tendencies. People may be asked, “What do you like to do?” or, “What are our gifts?” meaning, what are the capabilities with which you were born. And discovering our strengths and weaknesses is important; in fact it’s something we will address later. But calling is different. It’s not something we discover by observations; it’s something we hear directly from God. Saying that doesn’t mean a person has to audibly hear God’s voice to know their calling. As we all know, God speaks in many different ways. But still, there is a distinct difference between something we decide to do, even those things we decide to do for God, and something we believe He has commanded us to do. How we hear this command is not as important as recognizing that He has spoken to us. What really matters is the deep conviction that God is the One who said it.

At this point, we need to make another very important distinction. Calling is not about what we do; it’s about people. God calls us to carry Him to certain groups of people, and what differs from one person’s call to another is the type of people to which they are called: old, young, lonely, hungry, untaught, lost, sick etc. Whereas gifting is the way God has uniquely designed each person to minister to those people, our call then is who we are to reach; our gifts indicate how we can help them. In fact, we are often called to serve people in ways that are clearly outside our gifts. In some situations because there is a need, we simply do the best we can in spite of the fact we’re not gifted at it.

LISTENING TO GOD:

In the course of this study you’ll be pressed to ask yourself two questions: “What has God said to me?” and “For whom has He given me a special love?” Our hope is to help you discover what God has already “spoken” to you even if you haven’t recognized it. If this thought is new to you, be encouraged to begin to listen diligently because every believer is called by God to serve Him, and there is a particular “field” into which He is directing each one of us.

This process is called a “God-guided self-discovery.” Ultimately, no one can hear your call for you. You must hear God’s “voice” for yourself because it is in the hearing that faith comes alive. It is the knowledge God Himself has called you that will embolden you and help you persevere through opposition and discouragement. The questions and statements provided are designed

to help you search your heart for those things God has uniquely said to you as well as help you identify obstacles that may consciously or subconsciously prevent you from moving forward.

God can change a person's assignment whenever He wants to, in fact, for most people there will be different seasons of life in which God calls them to serve in different ways. What remains constant from season to season is the compassion He gives us for certain areas of human need.

INSTRUCTIONS

READING:

See Addendum C or syllabus for a list of recommended books. This list is intentionally small. This is not meant to be an academic study but rather a time of personal inquiry. The books are short in length and speak to issues which often block or confuse us when we're trying to follow God. They help us recognize attitudes which might prevent us from obeying God's call. They encourage us to choose a path which requires humility and faith. It would be best to read all the books early in the course during the process of reflection. Hopefully they will inspire you.

REFLECTION:

1. My spiritual history (*remember*)

The first step in this process is reflection. We invite you to remember how God has worked in your life. Create a timeline which begins at your birth (or even before if God said things about you to your parents, grandparents, etc.), and continues up to the present. Please place on this line everything of which you would say "that was an important moment in which God was at work in my life."

Below is a list of events which might be included:

- My first thoughts and questions about God.
- Miracles, answered prayers, I have experienced.
- Moments when God was especially close.
- Moments when I saw God use me powerfully.
- Spiritual attacks I have endured and how long they lasted.
- People who inspired me, who made me say, "I want to be like that person."
- The 2 or 3 most important things I've ever done.
- The day I really gave my life to Jesus as my Lord and Savior.
- The day I was baptized in the Holy Spirit.
- The day I was baptized in water.
- My first pastor. Who? Where?

- My first mission trip to take God's love to people who were different from me. When: Where: With whom?
- Prophetic words about me I have never forgotten.
- Verses of Scripture I believe God gave to me as a promise (list them).
- Visions from God.
- Words from God (I believe I heard God say this to me). When? Where? If there are many, list the ones that have actually changed the way you think or the course of your life.
- If you heard God ask you to serve Him in a special way, please note when and where on your timeline and write down, as closely as you can, exactly what He said to you.

This step will probably require several "Sabbath" days of reflection during which it might help you to fast in one form or another. Your goal will be to relax, draw close to God, and let Him remind you of things He has done in your life. A journal should be at hand, and as thoughts come to mind, write them down. Do not be concerned about answering the above events in order. The Holy Spirit has His own order. Over the course of several such times of reflection, most of these categories will be addressed. Some people will have had more spiritual experience than others, because they are older or have been raised in a believing home, so please do not compare yourself to anyone else; just reflect on your own spiritual history. Remember your history isn't complete. You're preparing for what God is going to do through you in the future!

Once you have prepared your spiritual history, which includes the timeline and any pages of writing you may have done while reflecting, it's time to get together with the others in your group who have been doing the same thing (see Addendum A).

Since there are always obstacles making it hard to recognize God's call on our lives, here are some questions and statements which may help you address these (see Addendum B).

2. What God has said to me (*understand*)

The second step of this process is understanding. It contains two elements:

The first element is to review your spiritual history and select the most important encounters or words you have had from God. Have you been given promises or words of guidance you know in your heart God spoke to you? Please do not hide these, even if you think revealing them may be embarrassing.

Remember, whenever God speaks to our heart, our head always argues with it. So the question we're asking at this point is, "What do you believe you've heard; not is it realistic?" (too big or too small). Please look for the "common thread" in how God has used you in His

service, words He has spoken to you, or “doors” that have opened. Do you see trends or patterns on how God has used you? Write this down as a simple statement, using no more than one or two sentences.

The second element is to recognize His love at work in us. Remember, God always calls us to certain kinds of people. And with that call, He gives us a special compassion, a gift of His love which is focused on human need. So in seeking His call, ask yourself, “For whom do I feel God’s special love? For what areas of human need has He given me an enduring concern?” As you think about this, you might find that particular situations deeply frustrate you. You may have found yourself thinking over and over again, “Somebody ought to do something about that! Can’t people see the desperate need there is for _____?” An old-fashioned term for this type of enduring concern is the word “burden.” People have long recognized God will place a “burden” or “yoke” on someone’s shoulders. Identifying this special love, and seeing it as a part of the way God has designed us, is an important part of hearing His call. Again, in a few sentences try to state clearly the burden God has given you.

After you have written these statements, provide a copy for each person in your group and gather to discuss it. Since these statements are much shorter, time may allow for everyone to share their statements. At this point, if there is still nothing conclusive for you, don’t worry. It will come in time. Let those in your group pray for you, including laying on of hands, asking for clear guidance and thanking God for His calling on your life.

3. My spiritual future (*desire*)

The third step of this process is to consider a possible plan for your spiritual future. Obviously, only God knows all He has planned for you, but this step is meant to identify the longings and faith He has placed within you. God actually puts the desire in us to do what He wants us to do (Php 2:13). So don’t be afraid to look inside and dream big! If you could do for God all you long to do, what would it be? If you like, write a job description for the ministry you’d love to do; be as specific as possible. What do you hope to be doing for Him between now and heaven? What will your spiritual “fruit” look like?

Of course, we know God has a plan for each of us, and much of it is hidden from us. But the exercise you’re doing now is meant to help you get in touch with the dreams and hopes He’s placed in your heart. And yes, we will always need to separate these from our selfish ambitions, yet there are holy “ambitions” inside us as well. God Himself put them there.

Finally, we ask you to picture the day when you will stand before Jesus. After thanking and worshiping Him for all He has done for you, how would you finish this sentence: “Jesus, here’s how I used my life to serve you _____ . This is my gift to you!”

THE NEXT STEP

If you have not been able to discern your call during this exercise, then your next step will be to keep seeking, keep listening. We suggest you set aside regular time to wait before Him and journal what you hear. God will talk about what He wants to talk about which may not yet be how He's called you to serve Him. There may be issues He needs to heal or remove before He can talk to you about your ministry. You might keep the questions in this study in mind and use them for reflection during your times with God.

If you have come to a point where you believe you have discerned His call, it will also be important to ask God for the next step. What does He want you to do now? How are you to prepare? This too would make an excellent subject for your discussion group.

ADDENDUM A—GROUP DISCUSSION

Your group should be comprised of not more than 4 or 5 people. Never try to have several people share in one meeting. A single meeting should be devoted to one person.

- The person should hand out or electronically send to the group a copy of their timeline, including any other written material they believe is important.
- As the person shares this information during the discussion, each member should listen prayerfully (What are you observing? What seems especially important?).
- Ask questions if necessary, comment where appropriate, but through it all be careful not to push someone to a conclusion.
- Be careful not to turn the conversation to another subject or another person.
- Please note: there is no need to come to a conclusion about this person's call. We are merely waking up each other's memory by reflecting on what God has done. We can "connect the dots" later.

ADDENDUM B

FEARS & SELF-DOUBT:

- Trying to find something at which you can't fail keeps life small and disappointing.
- "I can't do that because..."
- How will I pay for it?
- It will require too much work. It will wear me out, ruin my family, make me sick.
- I'm getting too old for that.
- I'm too young, no one will listen to me.
- I'm not smart enough, people who do that are brilliant.
- I'm a woman, and I face cultural restraints.

List your own fears and self-doubts:

SELF-LOVE, AMBITION:

- I want to be comfortable, safe, happy.
- I want people to be impressed when I tell them what I do.
- What will my parents, spouse, or my spouse's parents say?
- I want to be rich, I don't want to have to trust God for my finances.

List obstacles you might face in this category:

SPOUSE/FAMILY:

- I want to do this but....
 - My wife/husband doesn't.
 - My children don't want to move.

- Our parents are bitterly against it.
- Will I have enough money to put my children through college?
- Will I ever own a house? Will I have medical insurance if my family gets sick?
- My spouse and I share the desire to be in ministry together as partners.
- My spouse is supportive of my desire to minister but doesn't wish to be directly involved at this time.

SEASONS

WHAT SEASON IN YOUR LIFE ARE YOU IN?

- Young and looking for a career.
- In school and have ___ years until I graduate.
- A parent of small children who need my time and energy.
- Mid-career and am interested in serving the Lord as a tent-maker.
- End of career and only ___ years until retirement. I want to prepare for using my retirement years fruitfully.
- Retired and have time available.

AVAILABLE TIME

- I am working ___ hours/week and can reasonably expect to give ___ hours/week/month to a specific ministry.
- I am willing to raise my own support and function like a missionary (here or abroad).
- I am hoping for a salaried position in ministry.
- I have adequate financial means.

ADDENDUM C

- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Selfless Way of the Christ, Downward Mobility in the Spiritual Life*. Orbis Boos, Mary Knoll, NY 2007
- Blackaby, Henry T. *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*. Sister, OR; Multnomah, 2003
- *Women in Ministry Leadership*. Foursquare Media, 2021, www.foursquareshop.org
- Bengé, Janet and Geoff Bengé, *Christian Heroes, Then and Now Series*. Published by YWAM. There are many biographies in this series. Please select and read any one you'd like. These give an inspiring view of men and women who have answered God's call.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Classes are scheduled weekly for one hour and ten minutes:

Week 1

Class Assignment: Watch Introductory Video by Steve Schell.

Homework: Prepare your Spiritual History.

- One student to share in Week 2
- Group listens, prays and asks questions
- See Addendum A

Reading: Begin *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*.

Week 2

Group Discussion:

- The first student shares their spiritual history.
- Focus in on one student.
- Others listen, pray, ask questions

Homework: Continue preparing your Spiritual History.

Reading: Continue *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*.

Week 3

Group Discussion:

- The second student shares their spiritual history.
- Focus is on one student.
- Others listen, pray, ask questions.

Homework: Continue preparing your Spiritual History.

Reading: Finish *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*.

Week 4

Group Discussion:

- The third student shares their spiritual history.
- Focus is on one student.
- Others listen, pray, ask questions.

Homework: Continue preparing your Spiritual History.

Reading: If needed, continue reading *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*.

1st Reading Report Due: *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*.

Week 5**Group Discussion:**

- The fourth student shares their spiritual history.
- Focus is on one student.
- Others listen, pray, ask questions.

Homework: Continue preparing your Spiritual History.

Reading: Begin *The Selfless Way of Christ*.

Week 6**Group Discussion:**

- The fifth student shares their spiritual history.
- Focus is on one student.
- Others listen, pray, ask questions.

Homework: Begin preparing "What God has said to you."

- See Addendum B.

Reading: Finish *The Selfless Way of Christ*.

Week 7

Group Discussion: Understanding what God has said.

- The first 2 students should be able to share.
- What are the most important things God has said and done through you?
- What people has He given you a special love for?

Homework: Continue preparing "What God has said to you."

Reading: Begin *Women in Ministry Leadership*.

2nd Reading Report Due: *The Selfless Way of Christ*

Week 8

Group Discussion: Understanding "What God has said".

- The next 2 or 3 students should be able to share.
- What are the most important things God has said and done through you?
- What people has He given you a special love for?

Homework: Prepare "My Spiritual Future"

- See Addendum B.

Reading: Continue reading *Women in Ministry Leadership*.

Week 9

Group Discussion: "My Spiritual Future"

- All students should be able to share.
- What do you envision God doing through you?

- What is your plan to accomplish this?

Homework: Read through Addendum B.

- Which of these statements apply to you?
- What are you going to do about them?

Reading: Finish *Women in Ministry Leadership*.

Week 10

Group Discussion: Addendum B

- Discuss what you have learned and your plan for overcoming these issues.

Homework: Answer these questions:

- What is your calling?
- Who are the people you are called to?

Reading: Begin reading your *Christian Hero* book.

3rd Reading Report Due: *Women in Ministry Leadership*

Week 11

Group Discussion: Your homework and course textbooks.

- Identify your calling and people group.
- Discuss your course textbooks and how they affect you.

Homework: Review your:

- Timeline
- What God has said to you
- Your Spiritual Future

Reading: Finish reading your *Christian Hero* book.

Week 12

Class Discussion: Whole class participation.

- Share what you have learned and your observations about the class.

4th Reading Report Due: *Christian Hero* book.