

What is God's calling for your life?

Reference: GWL-S01-001-Mw-R00-P1

(Originally spoken on 23 March 1997, edited on 5 November 2011)

Web site: <http://www.ajourneyinlife.org> and <http://www.ajourneyinlife.com>

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I am considering with you today the subject: "What is God's calling for your life?"

My consideration with you would basically be in terms of the meaning in this direction: "What is God's purpose for your life?" or "What does God want you to be and to do?" There are different ways that you can phrase it, but the meaning I am seeking to consider with you basically is: "What is God's purpose for your life?", "What does God want you to be and to do?" So: "What is God's calling for your life?"

When Christians are faced with this question, very often, what comes to their mind is something very striking, something prominent – something that many people consider very significant, obvious.

Some people will say, "I am called to be a missionary." And for many people they may regard this as the highest calling: Those who are spiritual, those who love God deeply, these are the ones who would be called to be missionaries – to go to another country, to those who have not heard the gospel, to preach to them, to help them to know the Lord.

In specific ways, others may say, "I am called to be an evangelist. God has given me a gift in evangelism; my calling is to be an evangelist." Some others may say, "My calling is to be a Bible translator. There are many people who need the Bible in their own language and God has called me to be a Bible translator." Others may say, "I am called to set up an orphanage to care for orphans, for children in need."

Others may say, "My calling may not seem so spiritual but it is equally important. I am called to be a teacher." Some others may say, "I am called to be a homemaker."

Well, there are also various ones who are urged and called upon to be "prayer warriors". Some people are called, they think, to be "prayer warriors".

But, it may be that a large majority may respond by saying, "I have no calling. I have no calling because I am just an ordinary Christian" or "I am not good enough for God to call me".

Some others may say, "My calling is to be a good Christian: To live my life properly as a good Christian – that is my calling."

Someone may say, "I have been called to be a member of the body of Christ: I must function well as a member of the body of Christ."

Well, there are various responses that people may give to this question and it is helpful for us to try to understand how the Lord looks at it.

How does He call us? What does He intend to do with our lives?

Some questions we may wish to consider:

Who has a calling? Does this apply to all? Do all of us have a calling? Or is it only for some – only some people have a calling – some more prominent, special people like the apostle Paul or Moses, but many people do not have a calling? Is that so?

What about non-Christians? Do non-Christians have a calling?

Is a calling temporary, for specific tasks, whether for a short duration or for a longer duration? Is a calling temporary?

Is there a calling for our total life, our whole life? Is there such a calling that is not restricted to specific tasks but it refers to our total life? Is there such a calling?

When does our calling begin?

So, with this background, let us look at **1 Corinthians 1: 1-2**.

1 Corinthians 1: 1-2

- 1 Paul, called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
- 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

Here in these two verses we have a reference to two groups of people. The apostle Paul refers to himself as: “called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ” or “called an apostle”. The second category is in **verse 2**: the Corinthian Church (the Corinthians who are Christians) – “saints by calling”.

The terms used for these two contexts are basically the same, so we can refer to Paul as “called *as* an apostle” or we can translate it as “a called apostle” – an apostle who is called, “a called apostle”. Or we can say, “He was called by God to be an apostle”.

For the Corinthians, “saints by calling”, we can also translate it as “called saints” – just as Paul was a “called apostle”, they were “called saints” – or we can say: “They were called by God to be saints”.

If we examine this more closely, we would recognize that when Paul referred to himself as a “called apostle”, it is more specific in nature. It is in the category of the specific kind of calling: “called *as* an apostle”.

The reference to the Corinthians is more general, it is a general calling: calling to be saints. The word “saints” basically means “holy ones” - “called to be saints or holy ones or sanctified ones, set apart ones”.

If you ponder, you would recognize that Paul was also called to be a saint. So that general calling applied, not just to the Corinthians, but to Paul as well. Paul was also called to be a saint; but with that general calling he had a specific kind of calling to be an apostle.

The Corinthians were not called to be apostles – these Corinthians generally. We may then ask the question: “Did the Corinthian Christians also have specific callings?” Paul had a specific kind of calling. What about the Corinthian Christians? What about us, Christians in general, do we also have specific callings?

Let us consider first the general calling:

Do non-Christians also have a general calling? Our concentration is on Christians, but we began as non-Christians. Is there a calling for non-Christians?

In **Acts 17: 30-31**, the apostle Paul was preaching to non-Christians and he said:

- 30 Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,
31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

So here we have Paul telling us that God has issued a calling to all men everywhere that they should repent. They should repent and come to Him, come to God, that they might find forgiveness, they might find spiritual life. So there is a call from God that all everywhere should repent, should turn to Him.

The Lord Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry on earth said this in **Mark 1: 14-15**.

Mark 1: 14 -15

- 14 And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,
15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

So the Lord Jesus called on all men to repent and believe in the gospel.

Why then is there this calling for repentance? Why does God call men to come to Him?

John 3: 16 tells us:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

So we see that God has issued the call because of His love. God wants us all to repent because He loves us. He so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. So God is calling on all men everywhere to repent, to believe, to respond in faith to what He has done for us through Christ, so that we will not perish, but have eternal life. God intends to give this life to all who would respond positively.

Revelation 22:17

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come."
And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life
without cost.

So the calling, the invitation here, is there: "Whoever is thirsty let
him come, whoever is repentant let him come, whoever is prepared to
follow God let him come." So then we see there is a general calling for
all men, including non-Christians.

God calls upon us to partake of eternal life. So the path of repentance
and faith will then lead to the calling to be saints. God calls us to
repentance because He wants us to be saints. So when Paul wrote to the
Corinthians he says, "You are saints by calling." When you have repented,
when you have come to the Lord Jesus Christ, this is what you ought to
be – this is your calling: to be saints.

This is God's intention for all mankind, God's calling for all.
"Saints" basically means "holy ones". So God has called us to the path of
holiness.

1 Peter 1: 14-16

- 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours*
in your ignorance,
15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your*
behaviour;
16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

The apostle Peter tells us we are all called, as His children, to be holy
because God is holy. So there is a call for us to be transformed. He says,
"Do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance" – the
way you lived in the past, in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the
boastful pride of life, following the ways of the world – you must change
from that way of living.

So there is a call to change to a new life of holiness. So we see here an emphasis on moral and spiritual quality of character – God's call for moral and spiritual quality of character – and with it the quality of living and quality of fellowship with God.

While all this is included in the call to be holy, there is an emphasis on the call to moral and spiritual quality of character. So this is a primary aspect of God's general calling for all mankind and for all Christians to concentrate in this direction of life.

1 Corinthians 1: 9

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here the apostle Paul says God has called us into fellowship with His Son. We see here the emphasis on fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and, in that context, fellowship with God and also fellowship with the people of God. This aspect is mentioned by John in **1 John 1:3**.

1 John 1:3

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

So God has called us to holiness of character; God has called us to meaningful fellowship with Him, with the Lord Jesus Christ and with the people of God.

The Lord Jesus in **Matthew 5: 8** tells us the relationship between the two.

Matthew 5: 8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

This emphasizes the relationship between moral character and depth of fellowship with God, oneness with Him.

“Blessed are the pure in heart”: It is those where there is quality morally and spiritually in their heart who will see God, where there would be depth, quality of fellowship with God, oneness with Him. There is a clear and definite relationship between the two. So God calls us to purity of heart as well as depth and quality of fellowship with Him. The two come together.

Before we can appreciate our specific calling in a proper perspective, we need to recognize the vital importance of a deep quality in our response to our general calling. Before we can properly appreciate our specific calling in a healthy perspective, we must recognize the vital importance of a deep quality in our response to our general calling.

This is because if there is not significant quality in our general calling, we can never meaningfully fulfil our specific calling. So this principle is very important that we must always remember. We must concentrate on our general calling – that there must be sufficient quality, depth and meaning if we want to fulfil God's specific calling in our lives.

What does God want all of us to be?

We know, from what the Scriptures have indicated, God wants all of us to be holy, to be pure, to be one in heart with Him. So in terms of our being, in terms of our character, this is primary: God wants us to be holy, to be pure, to be one in heart with Him. So, all of us have this calling: this is a common calling – all of us have this calling to be such.

What about what God wants us to do? Is there something that God wants us all to do in our time on earth as His children? Is there also a common calling in this area? What has God called us to do in the context of being what we ought to be?

Ephesians 4: 11-16

- 11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,
- 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
- 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.
- 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
- 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ,
- 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Here, we see a description of what God intends for all of us. He has a calling for each one of us. There is something for us to do.

He tells us, through the apostle Paul, that He gave some *as* apostles, some *as* prophets, some *as* evangelists, some *as* pastors and teachers. That list is not exhaustive but representative of God's provision of people to fulfil a task.

He says: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ". "The work of service", "the building up of the body of Christ" – that is something that is a calling for every one of us. All of us are called to that. All of us are called to this work of service; all of us are called to the building up of the body of Christ.

And he says that the purpose of this is to lead in the direction: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ". It is meant to lead in the direction where all of us are helped to grow to the quality of maturity, of holiness, of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ, so that "we are no longer to be children," but "we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ".

God's intention is that the body should continue to grow and to build itself up in love. So the growth of the quality of the body of Christ is what all of us are called to do, to contribute to that. This, of course, will include bringing the gospel to unbelievers so that they can come to know God and be a member of the body of Christ. It will include our helping one another as members of the body of Christ to grow in quality, in depth, in maturity, to the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

So all of us have this calling to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ; all of us have this calling to help one another to attain the highest quality of moral and spiritual development so that we can fulfil God's purposes in Christ.

So God intends each one of us to contribute in that direction: There is something for each one of us to do. In that sense it is a general calling, a common calling – all of us are to contribute in that direction.

I will not be elaborating much at this point of time, but for today, I want to concentrate on our specific calling in the context of appreciation of this general calling. So we need to bear in mind that if we are not faithful in our general calling, we cannot be faithful in our specific calling.

Now let us consider: What about our specific calling? Is there such a calling for each one of us? What does it mean? How does it work? How can we respond meaningfully?

1 Corinthians 12: 28-30

- 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.
- 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they?
- 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

The apostle Paul asked a question: "All are not apostles, are they? ... All do not have gifts of healings, do they?"

So in this context, while he earlier mentioned that God has appointed in the church ... apostles ... prophets ... teachers ... miracles ... gifts of healings... then he mentions: "Not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all have gifts of healings, not all speak with tongues."

So when the apostle Paul spoke in this way, he is telling us that there are differences in different people. And in this context he is referring to specific tasks, responsibilities, contributions, and gifts. Here the apostle Paul categorises apostles, prophets, teachers together with those who work miracles, those who have gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.

As we ponder over this, it may come through to us that here the apostle Paul is referring to specific responsibilities and tasks and contributions that God may assign to different people. We are not assigned the same task; we are not given the same gifts. These responsibilities, these tasks and contributions may be for a short while or they may be for a longer term. Both are possible. Sometimes God may assign a task for a short period of time, sometimes for a longer period of time, but basically they are references to callings to specific tasks, responsibilities, contributions.

Here again we see the apostle Paul is careful to emphasize that these responsibilities must be fulfilled in the context of holiness of character. This is the principle we emphasised earlier. Any aspect of specific calling can be fulfilled meaningfully only when the general calling is properly responded to.

While the apostle Paul mentioned in **verse 31** "... earnestly desire the greater gifts" – that is those gifts that can be more edifying, can contribute to people – he says: "... I show you a still more excellent way".

Here he contrasts specific responsibilities, contributions, with a ... more excellent way. The way of life, the way of living, the way to fulfil those specific tasks is the way of divine love.

So **1 Corinthians 13: 1-3** refers to our general calling, in the context of which specific tasks are to be fulfilled. So the apostle Paul says:

1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

- 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- 2 And if I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

The apostle Paul tells us that what we are in response to our general calling, to be holy in character, to be pure in heart, is critical. Without this, all other things that we do and seek to contribute would be as nothing.

So while there is a place for us to try to understand the principle of specific calling, we must constantly come back to this realization and emphasis: to be faithful to our general calling, and in that context to fulfil our specific calling.

So in this passage we see that there can be a calling for specific tasks. God may assign specific tasks to different people either for a short time or for a longer duration. There can be a specific calling for specific tasks.

However, this does not refer to our total life.

God may call us to specific tasks, but this is not equivalent to a specific calling for our total life. And this is the issue that I want to address more thoroughly at this point of time.

Is there a specific calling for our total life?

For each one of us, is there a specific calling, not just for a specific task that God may assign to us from time to time, but for our whole life, every moment of our life?

Before we go further to consider that, we can appreciate the principle that specific tasks and responsibilities contribute to the whole. God may give us specific tasks and responsibilities from time to time along the way in our lives – they contribute to the whole, but they are not the whole. Specific tasks and responsibilities contribute to the whole. Specific events of our lives are part of the total life. There may be various specific events where we can more readily recognize God's calling to do something, but these specific events are part of the total life.

And God's calling in such situations represents only a part of His specific calling for our total lives. God's calling in such specific events, in such situations, represents only a part of His specific calling for our total lives.

Let us consider some situations.

Acts 9: 17

And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Here Ananias told Paul that the Lord Jesus had sent him – that is Ananias – so that Paul may regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We can say therefore that the Lord called Ananias to a specific task. At that point of time, Ananias, in his walk with God, recognized God's call to fulfil this function, to contribute to the life of Saul, the persecutor of the church, who was now responding to the living Christ – God's revelation. Ananias was fulfilling an important part in God's overall purposes for the body of Christ. He was contributing to the building up of the body of Christ but it was a specific task that the Lord had called him. So he said, "... the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me..."

If we were to refer to Ananias' task in this situation as a calling in the same kind of sense where people may regard it as a calling for a life, then would we call Ananias "an ambassador for Christ" – called to be "an ambassador for Christ"? He said, "The Lord Jesus sent me so I have come on His behalf." So in that sense he was an ambassador for Christ.

But we do not regard Ananias as being specifically called to be an ambassador of Christ as his total life. There was a function; there was a calling for that point of time; and Ananias, being faithful, responded that way. After the event, the Lord may have many other tasks for Ananias that are different from this kind where he ministered to Paul in this way.

So we see that God's call can be temporary: in specific areas, specific tasks, specific situations.

Let's turn to **Luke 2: 36-38**.

Luke 2: 36-38

- 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage,
- 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. And she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.
- 38 And at that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So we notice here that Anna spent many years of her life in the temple. **Verse 37** tells us "... she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers." We can say that God called her to that kind of ministry, to that kind of service.

As far as we can interpret from this passage, we see that she was faithful to God; God was pleased with her. So we can say God called her to that kind of ministry: fastings and prayers in the temple night and day. So that seems to be of a long-term duration.

But do we then say that Anna was called to be a "prayer warrior", that her calling for her total life was to be a "prayer warrior"? We know that she could have contributed significantly in her fastings and prayers in the spiritual realm, but that is only one part of her total life. There would be many other aspects of her life that God had called her to be and to do specifically in her life.

So while there may be some areas that can be quite significant, yet they do not form the specific calling for the total life.

Likewise: **Mark 12: 41-44.**

Mark 12: 41-44

- 41 And He [that is, the Lord Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the multitude were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.
- 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.
- 43 And calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury;
- 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

It is quite obvious from this text that the Lord Jesus was appreciative of this poor widow. And it is recorded in the Scriptures for all generations to read.

Surely the impact of her life would be very significant. Can we say that God called her to be an “exemplary giver”? Was that her calling, to be an “exemplary giver”? In one sense, we can see that she comes across to us as an exemplary giver – the right kind of spirit, a spirit of devotion to God, the willingness to part with all that she had.

It is a lesson on giving for all of us. But again we can see that if this poor widow were to live her life meaningfully in terms of God's specific calling for her total life, this act of giving would just form a part of that total life. What would be God's call for her in her total life?

1 Corinthians 16: 17-18: the apostle Paul wrote

- 17 And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.
18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

Again we see that these men contributed something positive in the building up of the body of Christ. Paul said “... they have refreshed my spirit and yours”

Can we say that their calling was to be “refreshers of spirit”? Was that their calling, to be “refreshers of spirit”? Here we are told that there was a positive contribution on their part – they refreshed Paul's spirit, as well as that of the Corinthians. Again we see that all these are part of the specific calling for the total life.

God calls us with reference to our total life but in that context there may be specific situations, specific tasks where God may call us to do something, to contribute something in specific situations whether for short term or long term. But all these are part of the specific calling for the total life.

What then is God's specific calling for our total life? Is there such a thing and how can we appreciate it?

1 Corinthians 12: 12-18

- 12 For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.
- 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
- 14 For the body is not one member, but many.
- 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.
- 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.
- 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?
- 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

Notice **verse 18** "... God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body just as He desired". The apostle Paul is here telling us that all Christians are members of the body of Christ; and where we are in the body of Christ, what function we are to contribute towards is determined by God. "...God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired" – which means that there is a specific calling for each one of us in the body of Christ.

And that calling is not restricted to just specific events, specific tasks, temporary periods of time. It is a reference to our place in God's overall purposes – a member of the body of Christ different from other members. So this principle is helpful for us to look at more closely: What does this mean?

First of all, we see in **verse 12** the apostle Paul says, "... even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ". The apostle Paul tells us that we are all members of the same body; we belong to one another in the body of Christ.

And yet although there is one body, there are many members. So the members are not the same; they are different. The members are different, but they all belong to the same body, which means that they all have the same calling. In being members of the body, we have the same calling as far as the general calling is concerned. We are all called upon to build up the body of Christ.

We have the same calling, but we also have a different calling specifically. Some are called to be the hand, some the foot, some the eye, some the ear. There is a difference.

The illustration of the body is not meant to be taken to be an illustration in a restrictive form. For example, it does not mean that just because the body has only two hands, only two persons can fulfil the function of hand, others will have to find something else to do. That is a picture of function - different function, different responsibilities, different parts, that we can contribute to the whole.

The apostle Paul says: "... by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit". So this applies to all. All Christians have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. This is a spiritual reality: a baptism into the spiritual body of Christ such that we now take our place as a member of the body of Christ.

But where we are in the body of Christ, what God has assigned to us is God's decision. **Verse 18:** "... God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired".

So this is something that we need to appreciate - that there is such a principle that we are different members of the body and our function, our responsibility, our calling is not the same. It is decided by God in this area of specific calling for our total life.

The foot, the hand, the ear, the eye – these are illustrations, analogies, of the principle that what God wants us to be and to do are not the same in the area of specific calling.

However, all of us have the same general calling: to be holy, to build up the body of Christ, to contribute to the lives of others, to fulfil the purposes of God.

It is important that we see these two together: We are all members of the same body with the same general calling, but we are different members of that same body and we have different callings in terms of the specific areas of responsibilities, what the Lord wants us to contribute, in our total life.

So **verse 18** has these implications. "... God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired": It means that where we are is God's sovereign choice. God decides and therefore it is not up to us to decide what we want to do with our lives, which part of the body we want to be. It is God's sovereign choice.

We submit to Him, we are obedient to Him; we walk with Him according to His guidance, according to His calling. Whatever He has chosen, whatever He has seen fit, we must support Him fully, obey Him fully. This is because God has placed us just as He desired out of His infinite wisdom. God sees all things; God is working towards a meaningful goal in the context of the whole of creation and God knows what He is seeking to accomplish and how He will accomplish these things.

So in the context of God's infinite wisdom, He has called each one of us in our total lives to contribute something to this total purpose that He has in mind.

We see only in very limited ways: We may think this is more helpful, more important, more beneficial; we may like to fulfil that role, that responsibility, but beware we may be easily deceived – we can easily go our own way if we do not sufficiently pay attention to the reality that God is infinitely wise and His ways are far higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. So we need to humbly submit to Him, learn from Him.

Also, it would mean that God would specifically enable each one of us, if we are faithful, to fulfil that calling because where God has placed the members ... just as He desired, He would also supply what is necessary for that member to function well.

Just as God has created the human body so that the eye can perceive light and the ear can receive sound waves, so too, if God has called you to be a spiritual eye or a spiritual ear, He will so equip you to fulfil that function. So too, for a hand or a foot, they are equipped by God to function according to God's intention. What they are called upon to be and to do would involve God's specific enabling.

And God's specific enabling can include the many years in which He has nurtured you in that specific context of your life – what He has taught you, the experiences that you have gone through, the people you have met; and it can also include the specific spiritual gifts that God may impart to you to help you to fulfil your responsibility.

So when God has placed you as a member in that context it would include God's specific enabling.

Then this will also mean that as God has placed the members ... just as He desired, all parts will contribute to God's total purpose. No one is left out. No one is useless.

Every single one of us, every member of the body of Christ has a function. Every member can meaningfully contribute to God's total purpose.

So it is God's intention that all parts should function well so that together we can effectively fulfil God's total purpose.

Now, this principle of each life being different in God's specific calling would also apply to people like Moses, Abraham, David and those who responded positively to God throughout the ages.

Since New Testament times, we refer to the body of Christ and we being a member of the body of Christ. But in God's purposes and God's plans, all who respond to Him positively will have a place in God's purposes. And God will have a meaningful purpose for each one to fulfil. Moses had his part, so too Abraham, so too David.

We may then ask: When does this calling begin? Does the calling begin after we have become faithful to God? Does the calling begin after we have reached maturity in Christian living?

Galatians 1: 11-17: the apostle Paul said

- 11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.
- 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
- 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it;
- 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.
- 15 But when He who had set me apart, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased
- 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,
- 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Paul said in **verse 15**: "... when God who had set me apart, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace ..." Here the apostle Paul gives us an insight into his calling. His calling did not begin after he responded to the gospel. He says: "... He had set me apart, *even* from my mother's womb ..." God had already called right from the very beginning of his life on earth. The calling was issued right from the very beginning.

And here in this context the apostle Paul referred to a major aspect of this calling, to minister to the Gentiles as an apostle. But this formed part of the total specific calling of his life which was: from his mother's womb God had called him.

You can say, "Well, God called him, God intended for him in the future to be an apostle to the Gentiles". That is one way of looking at it. But viewed in the light of the principle that God has placed us in the body of Christ, that it is meant to be a total life, we see that when God calls, even from his mother's womb, set him apart, it tells us that God has a calling even before we have responded.

God is calling us to respond; and as we respond, He is calling us to walk with Him, to fulfil the purposes that He has for each one of us.

This principle, as we see from various passages of the Scriptures, is not just applicable to Paul. The principle underlying it is relevant for all of us.

God knows each one of us even from our mother's womb; God cares for each one of us when we come into this world and God has called us right from the very beginning.

But would we respond? Not everyone responds meaningfully to God's calling. We may or we may not respond to God's call.

We all know that the general calling for everyone to repent and to believe in the gospel is not heeded by a vast majority of people. Many people have not responded to God's call to repentance. So too, many have failed to respond meaningfully to God's call for their total life.

So whether we are faithful to God's calling, that is dependent on our moral choice.

The apostle Paul said to King Agrippa: "... I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". But then, when Paul said he was not disobedient it was from that point of time when he met Christ. Prior to that, as he acknowledged that he was rebelling against God, he was doing many things contrary to the will of God.

We cannot say that the apostle Paul fulfilled God's calling right from the very beginning. He tells us in various passages of the Scriptures, how he lived his life contrary to the will of God. **Verse 14:** "... I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions". And it was in that context he said: "... you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism ... I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it" – that was contrary to the will of God.

But we know that God in His great wisdom, God in His infinite love and grace gave allowance for these responses of failure and faltering and wrong choices. And so God gives allowances and continues to help us by His grace to move in the direction of His calling. And so although the apostle Paul, at an early age in His life, did not respond meaningfully and positively to the call of God, God in His grace continued to watch over him, continued to help him; and this culminated in the event of his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

God in His grace helped Paul to come to recognize his failures, his wrong direction of life, to repent deeply and to give himself fully for the Lord. And Paul responded, and responded deeply.

So we can see that although God may have called us from the time we come into this world, we may have made many, many choices that are contrary to His will, living according to the spirit of the world, according to the desires of the flesh, according to natural thinking. We may have done many things contrary to God's call, but God does give allowance for all this and continues to help us in our various contexts of life in order to bring us to participate in His calling for our lives.

Ultimately though, we may or may not respond meaningfully to His call. God works hard to help us but we may not benefit from it if our hearts are hardened, if we are presumptuous, if we are not prepared to deal with our own lives deeply.

So the earlier we respond to God's calling the better. As children who recognize the path of righteousness in God's calling, if we respond early and respond deeply, the better it is for us. The more faithful we are, the more we can contribute our part to God's purposes.

Jeremiah 1: 4-6 gives us another example of a man whom God called.

Jeremiah 1: 4-6

- 4 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
- 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."
- 6 Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth."

When God spoke to Jeremiah at this stage, Jeremiah said, "... I am a youth". But God said, "... before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

So God already had a purpose for his life. In this context He says, "... I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." This was a major aspect of the function, the responsibility that God wanted Jeremiah to fulfil. But God's calling for Jeremiah would include his total life even prior to the time when he became a prophet. There would be a purpose that God had for his life. If Jeremiah were to respond well each moment of his life, God's purposes for him would unfold throughout his life.

So as we see this, we can appreciate the principle: God knows each one of us. Whether it is Paul or Jeremiah or anyone of us, the principle would still be relevant: God knows, God cares and God has a specific purpose, a specific calling for each one of us.

Whether as an eye or as an ear, or a hand or a foot, God will place us in the body of Christ, God will place us in the context of His total plan specifically. So right from the very beginning of our lives we all would have a calling from God: That is, if we were to respond well to God, every moment of our life will have meaning in the unfolding of what God intends to do through us.

As a moral being every positive choice that we make can contribute positively to God's kingdom. And in the context of God's enabling and provision and teaching, we will be able to meaningfully fulfil what He calls us to be and to do.

So we see, for example, Paul's calling for his life. If we can illustrate Paul's life by saying God's calling for him was to be an eye in the body of Christ: Being an eye represents the total life that he was meant to live - that calling is for the total life, but living out his life as an eye in the body of Christ would include various specific tasks that God would want him to fulfil; and this can include, in a very major sense, being an apostle to the Gentiles.

Being an apostle to the Gentiles was not the only thing that God wanted Paul to do, but it was a major aspect in the unfolding of God's purpose for him. We can say that God's calling for him as a total life would be to be an eye.

The same principle would apply to each one of us, whether we are a foot or a hand – that can represent God's specific calling for our total life. It is not just a reference to a specific task, specific situation – it is the whole life that we are living each day throughout our lives.

So we can put it in this way in terms of the meaning, as far as I can appreciate of this principle, we can consider it in this way: For each one of us there is a different context of life – we go through different circumstances, events, experiences; we have different spiritual gifts; we experience the Lord's training and His guidance in different ways.

Although the general principle will be the same and is meant to lead in the direction that all of us will grow to become like Christ in our character and to build up the body of Christ, yet in terms of our function as a member of the body of Christ, God has sovereignly undertaken in all these areas. This includes God's awareness of our genetic background, our family context, the country we live in, the pressures and difficulties we encounter in our environment – God knows all this, He takes that into consideration in terms of what He is seeking to do with your life.

We need not be surprised and we need not be discouraged by the circumstances that we face because God has already taken all that into consideration in the part that He has assigned for you in the body of Christ; and if you are faithful, you can fulfil it. Each one of us can fulfil our part meaningfully.

The apostle Paul talks about the proper working of each individual part. That is God's calling, God's intention that every individual part of the body of Christ should function properly. It is possible.

We may find our situations very difficult and we may tend to compare with other people: "Why is my situation more difficult than theirs? Why do I have so many disadvantages?" We may think in that way, but that is not wise, neither is that accurate or objective. God knows your circumstances and God will provide for whatever is necessary for that eye to function well, for the ear to function well; so too for the hand and for the foot.

What we can contribute specifically is different from others. The eye is different from the nose; the hand is different from the foot. And yet the apostle Paul tells us all the parts are necessary, all the parts will contribute.

He says, "... if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing where would the sense of smell be?" This is to tell us that we should not all desire the same function. We should not compare with other people and say, "That is more important, I want that function."

All of us have a function; all of us have a place in the body of Christ and we are all necessary for the body. The eye is necessary, so too the ear, so too the nose, the hand, the foot.

So God in His wisdom and in His sovereignty: He will appoint, He will assign, He will guide, He will equip and He will enable. What is required of us is to be faithful in what God has assigned to us, what God has called us - this is the critical issue. Will we be faithful to that calling? And that, at the heart of it, has to do with our moral choice.

Circumstances cannot stop us from fulfilling God's call. Difficulties cannot prevent us from walking in God's ways. The evil one cannot demolish God's plans for our lives. It is up to us. Will we trust Him, submit to Him, be sensitive to what He has to say? Or do we have our own plans, our own ideas – what we think is more helpful, what we think we can contribute more effectively?

God placed us in the body of Christ in accordance with His sovereign wisdom. It is very important that we do not seek to be someone else. We do not seek to do what is meant for someone else. We must learn to be what God wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do.

Each one of us is unique. Each one of us is unique – we are different. So while our character is meant to move in the same direction, yet we must recognize that we are different in terms of our place in God's purposes; and God in His sovereign wisdom will work in such a way that if all of us function well together in our total life in the way we live for Him, the body will be built up in love, there will be increasing quality, and God will be able to dwell in our midst, in the body of Christ, with glory and with freedom.

If one part does not function well, this would have effects on other parts of the body. The apostle Paul tells us, "... if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." If one part does not function well, other parts will suffer and may need to shoulder more responsibility.

It does not mean that if one part does not function well, all the other parts cannot function well, but there will be an effect on the body. Each one of us can respond well to God in His calling but in terms of the total body, the failure of different members of the body will affect the functioning of the total body.

As a physical parallel, we can see that if the hand is injured or the hand is paralysed, we may find it difficult to fulfil the functions of the hand as far as the whole body is concerned. And we know that there are those people who are without hands, who have learned to use their foot to do the things meant for the hand. People have learnt to paint with their foot because their hands are non-functioning. But I am sure we all know that it is much more difficult for the foot to paint than for the hand to do so.

So, if we do not fulfil our part well, others may have to shoulder some aspect of what may be more meaningfully done by us and it may be difficult to fulfil it in the same kind of way as God would intend it to be.

So all of us have an important function in the body of Christ, which cannot be totally taken over by somebody else; it would not be exactly the same.

But that does not mean that we are indispensable. If we do not respond well, God can raise up other people to fulfil what He can see would contribute best in that direction. But it means that each one of us has a valuable function in God's overall purposes.

So we see then that this principle affects not just specific tasks: It is a total life although it includes specific tasks. If we are faithful to God's calling for our total life, God will find it meaningful to assign to us various tasks along the way. If we are faithful in the way we have responded to Him, then various specific tasks can be effectively carried out. But if we do not respond well, those tasks may not be possible and God may have to assign those tasks to others. So while the specific tasks may be meaningful and God may call us to them, they are part of God's specific calling for our total lives.

So this calling for our total life involves every moment of our lives, every situation and every context. We are not meant to wait for future tasks. God's calling for our lives is continuous – it is a whole life that involves every moment of our life, every situation that we go through, every context that we encounter. How you respond in that situation would affect the unfolding of God's plan for your life. If we respond well, the Lord will work out His purposes through our lives in a very meaningful way.

1 Corinthians 10:31: the apostle Paul says:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Here the apostle Paul is telling us a very important principle. Doing all to the glory of God is something meant for us at every point of time in our lives.

He says, "... whatever you do ..." – anything, any area of life, any event, any situation – "... whatever you do," he says, "... do all ..." (and the word "all" means all kinds of things, all contexts, all situations) "... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." That means fulfil God's calling for your life, honour Him in the way you live your life every moment.

This includes the way you eat and the way you drink – situations which we may think are non-spiritual, situations which we may think do not contribute to the spiritual realm. But Paul says in all these things we can and ought to do all to the glory of God.

So the way we conduct ourselves each day in all situations of life will be a test as to whether you are fulfilling God's calling. Are we honouring Him, are we walking according to His purposes, general as well as specific? Every aspect will form part of this total life in God's specific calling in every moment and every situation.

If we are faithful we can trust God that He will arrange, He will undertake, He will enable us such that we can glorify Him in every situation.

Our calling is not just to be a teacher, a homemaker or a Bible translator. It is a whole life that God has called us to be and to do and every moment of our life we must bear a faithful testimony to God's grace and power in our lives.

We must be the salt of the earth, the light of the world in all the things that we do. So if we are faithful to God, then this will be true of our lives. So we need to evaluate the way we make decisions, the things that we do each day: why do we do them, how do we do them. Are we truly walking with God? Are we walking by the Spirit or are we walking by the flesh?

Let us recognize that whether we are faithful to our calling or not depends on our moral choice and our moral choices.

This refers to our general, as well as specific calling. It will depend on our moral choice in terms of the whole direction of our life, how settled are we, how deep it is in this whole direction. It will depend on our various choices in specific circumstances and events that we encounter, how do we respond in each situation that we face.

God may have given us a calling but we may not fulfil it.

Ephesians 4:1: the apostle Paul says:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...

Whatever calling that God has called us, whether general or specific, we are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling, which means that we can walk in a manner that is not worthy of that calling – we are not fulfilling what God desires.

Although God may have called us, ultimately that calling may be left unfulfilled. It applies to the general calling; it also applies to our specific calling. Are we working properly in our calling to contribute to the proper working of each individual part? In our specific contexts, are we fulfilling what God has called us?

If we are faithful to God and each moment of our lives is lived in fellowship with Him, in accordance with His guidance, then we will contribute meaningfully to God's purposes, often without recognizing the full impact.

Very often we are very conscious about how much we can contribute to other people and we may choose to do things which we think will contribute more to other people's lives to have a sense of achievement, but we may not realize that if we are truly faithful to God, there can be very much that we are contributing to God's kingdom and the spiritual realm that we are not even conscious of.

Do you think that the poor widow knew that she would contribute so much in the spiritual realm when she put those two ... copper coins as an offering? It is unlikely that she would have realized the impact in the spiritual realm for her faithfulness to God. She contributed so much that, throughout the ages people have been encouraged to walk in the path of cheerful and sacrificial giving because of her example. But the likelihood is that she might not have realized the extent, even a small portion of it.

The woman who anointed the Lord Jesus with the alabaster vial of perfume, while scolded by the disciples and while appreciated by the Lord Jesus, might not have realized, when she did so, that it would be so meaningful in the eyes of the Lord and would have such an impact on many who would read about what she had done. The Lord Jesus said, "Wherever the gospel is preached ... what she has done will ... be said in memory of her". She did because she understood that was meaningful before God and she contributed significantly.

Daniel's total life has been a significant encouragement and example for many who desire to be truly faithful to God. While we know that it does not mean that there were no failures on his part just because they are not recorded, yet it is clear from the recording in the **Book of Daniel** that God highly appreciated Daniel and the whole way he lived his life: from youth, from a young age, to old age, it was a life that is a good example of faithfulness to God - his total life lived in faithfulness to God.

Daniel might not have realized how significant his life would be in influencing others as he went through each moment of his life. When he refused the king's choice food, when he refused to stop praying to his God and was cast into the lions' den, Daniel might not have realized how great the impact could be on many, many generations to come.

So the important principle then is for us to learn to be faithful whatever God may have called us to be and to do.

However insignificant the part may seem to be, we are all important in the body of Christ.

However, we must take care: We may not be faithful to God's calling.

The apostle Paul says in **1 Corinthians 12: 15-16**:

1 Corinthians 12: 15-16

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.

16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.

Basically the principle is: Even if you say you are not *a part* of the body, that does not make you not *a part* of the body. He says: "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body,' it is not for this reason not *a part* of the body." The last part of the sentence can be translated literally as "not a part of the body". So because you say you are not a part of the body, that does not make you not a part of the body.

So God has called you; God has placed you there. Your calling is there. Whether you recognize it or you do not recognize it, whether you appreciate it or you do not appreciate it, there is a calling there.

But if you do not appreciate it, you do not respond well, you will not be working out God's call.

And we may not respond well because we do not appreciate the part that God has assigned to us. Some people want to be an eye and therefore they say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body." Some people want to be a hand and they say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body." To them that is important - they want that kind of function.

In **Acts 5: 1-5** we have the story of Ananias - another Ananias from the one we read earlier - and in this instance we are told that he lied ... to God. So this Ananias also had a calling for his life but because he was not walking according to what God had assigned to him - he walked in a way contrary to the will of God - he lied ... to God, a result of which God's judgment fell upon him.

It could be he wanted to follow the example of other people who sold the land and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet, and yet he was not prepared to lay everything at the apostles' feet. The apostle Peter told him, "When it was unsold, it belonged to you. After it was sold, it still belonged to you; you do not have to say that you have given all the proceeds if you find that you are not ready to give all."

Do not pretend to be somebody else. Do not pretend to do something that you are not really doing. Be what you can meaningfully be. Do not try to do something that you see other people do and you want to be like that. Be honest before God and do what you can meaningfully do. What is appropriate to you in your present circumstance, at your stage of development, what you can meaningfully do, do with all your heart, and ask God to help you to go on from there, to grow in quality, in depth.

We must understand also that God's calling is dynamic. While we may say that God has placed us as a hand, as a foot, as an eye, as an ear, but in terms of the development of our lives, in terms of how God may actually work out His purposes through us, we know that God takes into account our moral responses.

His calling for us can change. If we are faithful, then God would continue to work in our lives and work through us in a way that is the most meaningful. But if we do not respond well, God may change what He is calling us to be and to do in terms of our specific calling.

If our failures are not so serious, generally it is likely that God will accommodate. God may accommodate our failures along the way. As we seek to walk with Him, we falter, we fail, we are willing to learn, God may accommodate and continue to help us to fulfil that calling.

However, if our responses are significantly negative, if we become presumptuous, arrogant, proud, hardened in heart, God may change His calling: What He intended for us to do at the earlier stage may no longer materialize. He may no longer assign it to us.

So we cannot be presumptuous, careless, hardened. We must walk with God humbly and prayerfully.

And so in conclusion, if we want to be faithful to God in His calling in our lives, then we must take heed to what the apostle Paul said in **1 Thessalonians 5: 17**.

1 Thessalonians 5: 17: Paul said:

“...pray without ceasing...”

“Pray without ceasing” can meaningfully help us to be conscious of our calling, both general as well as specific.

It can help us to constantly have the right spirit and attitude before God, to be conscious of His will and His ways, to be sensitive to His guidance, to trust Him in each moment that we go through.

It can contribute to our learning to be faithful each moment and all our lives.

It is not necessary for us to know what is God's specific calling for our total life from beginning to end.

What we need to know is that God has a calling for us and if we are faithful to Him, we respond well, God will guide us as we go on: each moment, each day, each situation – there is a meaning, there is a purpose.

Whether it be at work, at home, in society, in all situations of life, there is a meaningful purpose that God has for each one of us which forms part of the total life that He intends for us to live, to be, to do, to contribute to the work of God, to take our place as a member of the body of Christ, to function well so that God's purposes can be effectively fulfilled, His name will be hallowed, His will ... done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

So let us not look at our lives just in terms of specific occasions, important events, although we do need to be cautious when situations are more important.

But let us remember that every moment of our lives is meant to be lived well. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to manifest Christ in our lives. His purposes are meant to be communicated in the way we live each day, each moment. And in this way we can then truly be a good witness for the Lord.

And this can include many moments when we do not seem to be doing anything, when we are just being what we ought to be. In the spiritual realm there can be a powerful witness, testimony and impact just by being what you ought to be, and where God calls specifically, to do what you ought to do.

So basically today we have sought to appreciate what is God's call for your life or what is God's purpose for your life, what God wants you to be and to do. We have seen that there is a general calling that is common to all of us and there is a specific calling for our total life.

The general calling concentrates on the quality of our character, our oneness with God in His being and His purposes and in contribution to the building up of the body of Christ, to contribute in our doing towards the building of the Kingdom of God.

The specific calling is unique to each one of us. God wants each one of us to live out our lives in the way that is meaningful before Him – the total life. And along the way if we are faithful, God will assign to us specific tasks: He will call us to specific tasks to contribute specifically in situations.

But ultimately, we need to bear in mind that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God.

I want to emphasize that while I have concentrated on considering the general calling as distinct from the specific calling, it is also important for us to appreciate that if we understand sufficiently deeply the full scope of our general calling, it would, in reality, include our specific calling.

This is because if we are truly pure in heart and we see God, it will mean that we will be walking in His ways. If we are holy as He is holy, our hearts are one with Him, we will be doing His will. So this is to help us appreciate that ultimately our concentration is on the quality of our heart, the carefulness to walk in God's ways, to be sensitive to His guidance. So quality of character will include all that.

But I have separated the two for emphasis so that we recognize that while there is a general direction of life, there is also a specific calling that is different for each one of us. But if each one of us is faithful in terms of this whole direction of life then we will be sensitive to God's guidance and we will be able to walk in His ways in our specific contexts.

Let us then as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to understand more clearly His calling for us and how to respond meaningfully to Him.