

## THE GOOD LIFE #2 A Life of Calling (part 1)

### Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

*Did you ever get asked what you wanted to do when you grew up when you were young?*

I didn't have the foggiest what I wanted to do, apart from once when I was about 10. I was at a confirmation class at the catholic church we all belonged to. We actually went off site on a Saturday and a nun – I think her name was Sister Marie Celine – there were statues in the garden - led us through the confirmation class and we were asked this question and I said I wanted to be a missionary. There was a slightly embarrassed pause, and then we moved on.

I came out of my teens into my 20s and a sense emerged of being called into some sort of vocational work for the Lord but flying off to a distant country was never on the cards for me – I had no desire. In fact I felt fear that God would call me to do exactly the thing I least wanted to do. Anyone else feel that way? Do you think that is congruent with a loving father who wants you to flourish?

So the call ups for anyone feeling called to leadership etc came at New Wine and other such conferences, and I would go up and get filled with the HS etc.

But I still didn't know what I wanted to do when I grew up! I still had no career ambition, so someone suggested teaching and I thought great – long holidays to do church stuff in, and lunchbreaks and finishing at 3pm I had plenty of time to do the church stuff that needed doing, and a teacher I became!

**Slightly more dramatic is the story of David Wilkerson, and his autobiography I read in my teens and it was one of those books that grabbed me and became part of me.**

David Wilkerson was a pastor in a nice little church in Pennsylvania, when one evening David was up late as usual at midnight watching the "Late Show" when he first asked the question: "What would happen, Lord, if I sold the TV set and spent that time—praying?"

After his television was actually sold, Wilkerson began to devote his midnight to 2 a.m. hours to prayer. One night while trying to pray, he found himself unusually drawn to an issue of Life magazine sitting on his desk. At first he thought he was being distracted, but he couldn't get away from it and finally asked, "God is there something you want me to see?"

He read the report of a gang on trial in New York. He recalls the story:

... my attention was caught by the eyes of one of the figures in the drawing. A boy. One of seven boys on trial for murder. The artist had caught such a look of bewilderment and hatred and despair in his features that I opened the magazine wide again to get a closer look. And as I did, I began to cry.

"What's the matter with me!" I said aloud, impatiently brushing away a tear. I looked at the picture more carefully. The boys were teen-agers. They were members of a gang called the Dragons. Beneath their picture was the story of how they had gone into Highbridge Park in New York and brutally attacked and killed a fifteen-year-old polio victim named Michael Farmer.

The picture struck him in a most powerful way and the impression wouldn't leave him. In the end he got into his beaten up old car and drove down to NY, not really having a plan. He went to the court in which the teenagers were being prosecuted, entered the room and asked the judge for permission to tell them something, but the judge ejected him.

So he drifted around the streets feeling like a failure and not really knowing what to do next. He found some lads from a gang and began to share the gospel with them, got rejected and carried on, eventually founding Teen Challenge, an addiction recovery program in Brooklyn.

But don't be led into the damaging falsehood that a calling has to be to do with a life as a church leader or missionary of some kind. God has a different calling for all of us. We have the biography of Eddie Stobart, who's calling was to work in the haulage industry. We have John Lewis, George Cadbury (who founded Bourneville – a village for his factory workers) and I love the famous quote from Eric Liddell.

Eric Liddell was a Scottish sprinter. He was raised in a devout Christian family. His sister felt that his running was frivolous, it was a waste of time. Here is how Eric Liddell responded,  
"God made me for a purpose... but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure."

***What has God called you to? What gets you out of bed in the morning? Have you found it yet?*** The whole issue of calling is both very compelling and also a bit confusing for some, frustrating or depressing for others and surrounded by fear of missing it or not finding it for many.

I want to help you with this.

I believe there's no better model for living life the way it ought to be lived than Jesus. He was the most giving, the most forgiving, the most loving, the most joyful, the most peaceful, the most patient, the most kind, the most truthful, the most free, the most amazing who ever lived. Before we explore the issue of our calling, we need to begin with the foundation on which our calling is built. That is knowing our identity.

### **I. Knowing our identity**

Let's read Matthew 3:17 again

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

There is a famous story told about Margaret Thatcher during the time that she was Prime Minister of England. She was visiting an old people's home, going from one room to another, meeting the residents. One older woman showed no particular sign of recognizing that she was shaking hands with a world-famous politician. So, Margaret Thatcher said to this old woman, "Do you know who I am?" The old woman answered, "No, dear. But I would ask the nurse, if I were you. She usually knows who we are."

How do we find out who we are?

There are many different voices all speaking into this – all trying to label, box, categorize or evaluate who we are.

Jesus had the same issues, but thankfully he didn't listen to the many different voices trying to tell him who he was.

He was called a glutton, a drunkard, when he went home they said; 'Isn't he Joseph's son the carpenter?' and in John 10:20 they said; 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?'

But Jesus didn't listen to the voices around him trying to label, categorize, limit or put him down.

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

The anchor for Jesus’ soul was that he knew himself to be the beloved of God, the infinitely loved Son of God.

- Jesus wasn’t searching for identity by the size of the crowd that was following him.
- Jesus didn’t find identity by competing with the other religious leaders of his day and discovering that he was more popular.
- He didn’t lose a sense of identity when the crowds began to dissipate, and he lost market share and business.
- Jesus didn’t form his identity around how much he knew or even how much he prayed.

**The anchor for Jesus’ soul was this rock solid faith that he was loved by God.**

To what extent have you stepped out of the busy-ness of the week this past week, and taken time to meditate on God’s love for you, receive it, be affirmed by it?

The good life springs from this continual soaking in, bathing in, drenching of our souls in the love of God.

**To know you that you are loved by God.**

Not because you were promoted, or your boss recognized your work, or you have earned a lot in bonuses, or because you have been an amazing parent, husband, wife, sister, neighbour, or you got into your first choice of uni, or you are doing really well – to know you are loved by God, not even because of your spiritual practices, the fact that you prayed this morning or read your Bible, or you’re leading a Good Life group, or having a good week with your diet.

**– to come to a place to say “None of those things are at the foundation of my identity”.**

I am the beloved of God.

And on what basis can we say that? What is the only sure foundation for identity?

## **II Knowing the gospel**

**The foundation for healthy identity is the gospel.**

Rom 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

We have to be very attentive to what the foundations of our faith and identity are. Two people can trot along to church and appear very similar in beliefs, attitude, everything, and then something happens and cracks appear which show that underneath they have a very different foundation. One might be based on religion, and the other on the gospel – that Christ died for you whilst you were still a sinner, and became a sacrifice in your place – he died that you might live – and not anything you can earn but grace alone based on his love for you. That foundation changes everything. The difference between the gospel and religion:

Religion says:	The Gospel says:
I make a sacrifice – therefore I’m accepted	I’m accepted – because Christ made a sacrifice

Religion says:	The Gospel says:
When circumstances in my life go wrong or I fail in my career or in school, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe that anyone is good is owed a successful life.	When circumstances in my life go wrong I struggle, but I know that while God may allow this difficulty for my training, my Father in heaven always loves me!

Let me ask you question. How do you interpret difficulty? Are you mad at God or mad at yourself because you're going through difficulties? That is religion. Because you believe that by your performance you are owed something by God. If you are living from the Gospel, you say "This is really hard. This really hurts. But I know that God loves me and I can trust him with my future."

Religion says:	The Gospel says:
My identity and self-worth are based on whether other people believe that my career is prestigious, my house is beautiful, and my children are successful.	My identity and self-worth are centred on the One who died a shameful death on a cross because he loved me. Therefore, I am free to pursue callings that may not be "high status" or "prestigious" in the eyes of the world.

And if your identity and self-worth is based upon how some other person or group perceives your accomplishments, you are enslaved by always having to appear successful in every area of your life. But if your identity is based on the gospel, you are free to be real, to allow others to see you as you are, and to pursue career and life choices based upon the person God created you to be.

So, knowing our identity and knowing the Gospel is the bedrock foundation for living the Good Life. We are now ready to tackle our calling! Next week I will share how we can use this foundation to step out into what God might be calling us into.

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