

LESSON 2: PURPOSE: CALLING & GIFTEDNESS

Objective: Though we don't always sense it, God has placed us in this time and place for a divinely appointed purpose. So often we seem to be tossed about by circumstances in life and we don't always realize God's hand moving us toward his mission for our lives. How can I discover why God has placed me here? How can I know what his purpose is for my life? How do I gain a better sense of my calling from God?

John 15:16:

Ye have not chosen me, but **I have chosen you**, and ordained you that ye should go and **bring forth fruit**; and that your fruit should remain . . .

2 Timothy 1:8-9:

. . . **be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel** according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and **called us with a holy calling**, not according to our works, but **according to his own purpose and grace**, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Romans 8:28:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **the called** according to his purpose.

D & C 24:1-4:

. . . I speak unto thee, Emma Smith . . . Behold, thy sins are forgiven thee, and **thou art an elect lady, whom I have called**. Murmur not . . . And **the office of thy calling shall be for a comfort** unto my servant Joseph Smith, Jr., thy husband in his afflictions, with consoling words, in the spirit of meekness. . . and be unto him for **a scribe** . . . And **thou shalt be ordained under his hand to expound Scriptures, and to exhort the church**, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit . . . and **thy time shall be given to writing, and to learning much**. And thou needest not fear . . . thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better . . . **make a selection of sacred hymns** . . . Continue in the spirit of meekness . . .

Jeremiah 1:5:

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and **I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations**.

Philippians 1:6:

. . . **he which hath begun a good work in you** will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:12-13:

That ye would walk worthy of **God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory**. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing . . .

At some point in their lives, those who have made a covenant with Christ look back and realize that they've actually been dependent on a power greater than themselves since birth. We each can look back and see that God has, to some degree, been nurturing, sustaining and guiding us through all the trials and hardships of this life.

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This is the work of the Holy Spirit that is actively engaged in the hearts of every person born on this earth. This is God's grace. At birth, it was God's grace that drew us toward a sense of right and wrong. At our rebirth, it was God's grace drawing us and calling us toward salvation and eternal life. Now that we are reborn, we sense God's grace calling us to become true disciples of Christ. This urgency within each of us is God's Holy Spirit **calling** us to the next level in our lives.

A MORAL SENSE

In the soul of each person born on this earth there is a deeply embedded sense of morality, what is right and wrong. We call that a conscience. It was given to us by our Creator before we ever made a commitment to Christ. Arminian theologians sometimes describe this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work as "**prevenient grace.**"

John 1:9:

. . . the true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world.

2 Nephi 1:67:

And men are instructed sufficiently, that they know good from evil.

D & C 83:7c:

. . . and the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world . . .

Romans 2:14-15:

. . . the Gentiles which have *not* the law, do by nature the things contained in the law . . . which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their *conscience* also bearing witness . . .

GOD'S CALL TO SALVATION

Long before we ever made a commitment to Christ, God's grace was calling us to become a child of God and be reborn in him. We entered God's kingdom through the narrow gate of faith, repentance and baptisms by water and Spirit. In being reborn, we received an assurance of salvation, that we would live in God's presence in eternity. The scriptures call this **salvation or justification**. Theologians sometimes describe this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work as "**justifying grace.**"

D & C 17:6a-b (salvation or justification):

And we know that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ and worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end, or they cannot be **saved** in the kingdom of God And we know that **justification** through the **grace** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true.

Mosiah 9:41-50 identifies **three purposes** for water baptism:

1. **covenant to obey** God's commandments - Mosiah 9:41 (also Acts 2:42)
2. **remission of sin** - Mosiah 9:40 & 44 (also Acts 2:38 & 22:16)
3. method of **entrance into Christ's Church** - Mosiah 9:50 (also Acts 2:41 & 47)

In **Mosiah 9:38-40**, at the Waters of Mormon, Alma 1 invited the people to make a covenant with God, and he identified **the duties of the believer**:

- Come into the fold of God & be called his people,
- Bear one another's burdens that they might be light,
- Mourn with those that mourn,

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- Comfort those that stand in need of comfort,
- Stand as witnesses of God at all times until death,

“. . . that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life.”

In **Mosiah 9:41**, Alma 1 said:

If this be the desire of your hearts, **what have you against being baptized** in the name of the Lord, as **a witness before him** that ye have entered into **a covenant** with him that ye will **serve** him and **keep his commandments**, that **he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?**

In **Mosiah 9:42**, the people “clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed, This is the desire of our hearts.”

In **Mosiah 9:43-45**, Alma 1 took Helam:

. . . and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying, O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart. And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said, Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into **a covenant to serve him until you are dead**, as to the mortal body; and may **the Spirit of the Lord** be poured out upon you; and **may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ**, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world.

In **Mosiah 9:46-50**, Alma 1 baptized all 204 souls in this manner, and they were:

. . . **filled with the grace of God**. And they were called the church of God, or **the church of Christ**, from that time forward . . . whosoever was **baptized** by the power and authority was **added to his church** . . .

Prior to Alma 1’s time, in **Mosiah 2:18-19**, King Benjamin described those who had been saved, or in other words justified, as having:

- “come to a knowledge of the glory of God”
- “known of his goodness”
- “tasted of his love”
- “received a remission of your sins,” and
- experienced “exceeding great joy in your souls.”

Mosiah 2:27-31:

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, Have ye spiritually been **born** of God? Have ye received **his image** in your countenances? Have ye experienced this **mighty change** in your hearts? Do ye exercise **faith** in the redemption of him who created you? [an assurance of salvation]

A CALL TO SANCTIFICATION & DISCIPLESHIP

After we have accepted the truth of the gospel and made a commitment to Christ, God’s grace draws us toward living sanctified lives. We want to understand what it means to be a “disciple of Christ.” We naturally want to know the disciplines that are involved in living such a life. Becoming a disciple of Christ is what this series of lessons tries to address. Theologians sometimes refer to this aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work as “**sanctifying grace**.”

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D & C 17:6c (discipleship & sanctification):

And we know, also, that **sanctification** through the **grace** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is just and true, to all **those who love and serve God with all their might, minds, and strength.**

D & C 17:6d-e then takes an anti-Calvinist turn when it stops to issue a warning that **it's possible to fall from grace**, something that new believers should all be aware of in considering the path to sanctification:

. . . **but there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God.** Therefore let the church **take heed** and pray always lest they fall into temptations; yea, and even let those who are sanctified, **take heed** also [see Hebrews 6:4-6].

Ephesians 4:22-24 (discipleship & sanctification):

And now I speak unto you . . . **put off the old man**, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the mind of the Spirit; and that ye **put on the new man**, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Romans 6:4-8 (discipleship & sanctification):

Therefore **we are buried with him by baptism into death**; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life.** For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his **death**, we shall be also in the likeness of his **resurrection**; knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed**, that **henceforth we should not serve sin.** For he that is dead to sin is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, **we believe that we shall also live with him.**

Helaman 2:31 (discipleship & sanctification):

Nevertheless, they did **fast** and **pray** oft, and did wax stronger and **stronger in their humility**, and firmer and **firmer in the faith** of Christ, unto the **filling their souls with joy and consolation**, yea, even to the **purifying and the sanctification of their hearts**, which sanctification cometh because of their **yielding their hearts unto God.**

Romans 12:1-2 (discipleship & sanctification):

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye **present your bodies a living sacrifice** [discipleship], **holy** [sanctification], acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but **be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God is.

Ephesians 4:13 (discipleship & sanctification):

Till we, in the **unity** of the faith, all come **to the knowledge of the Son of God**, unto a **perfect man**, unto **the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**;

A COMMON CALL TO MINISTRY (SERVICE)

Just as we were called by God to covenant with him at baptism, **all believers in Christ are then called to take up their cross and follow him in the path of discipleship.** In this lesson, we're referring to a "**common call**" because every member of Christ's church has a common call to divinely appointed duties that are clearly identified in scripture. In this section we give examples of three scriptural passages that identify a **member's duties**, but there are many more.

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Mosiah 9: Alma 1's Invitation to Be Baptized

Prior to the cross, Alma 1 gave an invitation to 204 people at the waters of Mormon to make a baptismal covenant. In that invitation he identified a list of **member's duties** that all believers share in common. **Mosiah 9:38-40** says we all have a sacred duty to:

- come into the fold of God [John 3:3-5],
- be called his people [Luke 9:26],
- bear one another's burdens that they might be light [Isaiah 58:6-8],
- mourn with those who mourn [Matthew 5:6],
- comfort those who stand in need of comfort [Matthew 25:35-47],
- stand as witnesses of God at all times until death [D&C 76:6g].

Mosiah 2: King Benjamin on the Sacred Duties of All Members

In **Mosiah 2:20-50**, King Benjamin said the person who had experienced a genuine salvation, or what Alma 2 called a "mighty change" (Alma 3:29), **should become a disciple and bear fruit in the following ways:**

- Always remember the greatness of God.
- Humble yourselves.
- Call on the name of the Lord daily.
- Always retain a remission of your sins.
- Grow in knowledge.
- Live peaceably.
- Don't allow your children to go hungry.
- Don't let children fight and quarrel.
- Teach them to love one another.
- Succor those who stand in need with your substance.
- Give to the beggar and don't turn him away, and don't say "He has brought this upon himself", or else you won't enter the kingdom.
- Impart of your substance.
- Don't condemn the beggar.
- If you have substance, you must give.
- Don't covet.
- Feed the hungry.
- Clothe the naked.
- Visit the sick and bring them ministry.
- Be diligent about the above duties, but do them in wisdom and order.
- Return anything you borrow.
- Carefully examine your thoughts, words and deeds.
- Continue in faith unto the end of your lives.

Romans 12: Apostle Paul on the Sacred Duties of All Members

In **Romans 12:1-21**, the apostle Paul lists more **duties that apply to the office of "member"** in Christ's Church:

- Present your bodies as a holy, living and acceptable sacrifice to God.
- Don't be conformed to this world.
- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- Carefully examine the facts to clearly identify what God's will is.
- Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to, but think soberly.

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- Besides a common call to ministry, every member has individual gifts and callings such as prophecy, ministering to the needs of others, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, showing mercy.
- Love others in a genuine manner.
- Abhor that which is evil, and cleave to the good.
- Be kind to one another, love others, honor them, give them preference.
- Don't be slothful in business, be fervent in your efforts, serve the Lord.
- Rejoice in hope.
- Be patient in tribulation.
- Be instant or quick to pray.
- Give to the needs of the saints.
- Be hospitable.
- Bless your persecutors, and don't curse them.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.
- Think the same way toward one another.
- Condescend to those of low estate, and don't be conceited.
- Don't return evil for evil done to you.
- Be honest in all your dealings before people.
- Make every effort to live peaceably with every person.
- Never seek to avenge a wrong (e.g., don't seek revenge).
- If your enemy is hungry feed him, if he is thirsty give him drink.
- Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with the good that you do.

A DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Following are three fairly long quotes from scripture. In each of these passages God reiterates **a few points about giftedness**:

- There is one Holy Spirit.
- Every believer is given a spiritual gift.
- The gifts granted by the Spirit are diverse (vary by individual, given "severally").
- We should earnestly seek after these gifts.
- These gifts of the Spirit will never leave the earth (will always be available to us unless there is unbelief)

1 Corinthians 12:4-11:

Now there are **diversities of gifts**, but the same Spirit. And there are **differences of administrations** [avenues of ministry], but the same Lord. And there are **diversities of operations** [different ways the Spirit works], but it is **the same God** which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of **wisdom**; to another the word of **knowledge** by the same Spirit. To another **faith . . . healing . . . miracles . . . prophecy . . . discerning** of spirits . . . diverse kinds of **tongues . . . interpretation . . .** But all these worketh **that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will . . .** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

I say unto you, Nay . . . covet earnestly the best gifts.

Moroni 10:8-14:

And again I exhort you, my brethren, that ye **deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God.** And there are **different ways that these gifts are administered**; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the

manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them. For behold, **to one is given by the Spirit of God**, that he may teach the word of **wisdom**; and to another, that he may teach the word of **knowledge** by the same Spirit; and to another exceeding great **faith**; and to another, the gifts of **healing** by the same Spirit. And again, to another, that he may work mighty **miracles**; and again, to another, that he may **prophesy** concerning all things; and again, to another, the beholding of **angels** and ministering spirits; and again, to another, all kinds of **tongues**; and again, to another, the **interpretation** of languages and of divers kinds of tongues. And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and **they come unto every man severally**, according as he will. And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ. And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that **all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.**

D & C 46:4-7:

. . . **seek ye earnestly the best gifts**, always remembering for what they are given. For verily I say unto you, They are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments . . . I would that ye should always remember, and always retain in your minds what those gifts are, that are given unto the church, **for all have not every gift given unto them**. For there are many gifts, and **to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God**. To some it is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby. To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to **know** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to **believe** on their words, that they also might have eternal life, if they continue faithful. And again, to some it is given by the Holy Ghost **to know the differences of administration** [avenues of ministry], as it will be pleasing unto the same Lord, according as the Lord will, suiting his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men. And again, it is given by the Holy Ghost to some **to know the diversities of operations** [different ways the Spirit works], whether it be of God, that the manifestations of the Spirit may be given to every man to profit withal. And again, verily I say unto you, To some it is given, by the Spirit of God, the word of **wisdom**. To another it is given the word of **knowledge**, that all may be taught to be wise and to have knowledge. And again, to some it is given to have **faith to be healed**, and to others it is given to have **faith to heal**. And again, to some it is given the workings of **miracles**; and to others it is given to **prophesy**, and to others the **discerning** of spirits. And again, it is given to some to speak with **tongues**, and to another it is given the **interpretation** of tongues. And **all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God.**

DISCOVERING GOD'S CALL TO SPECIFIC AVENUES OF SERVICE

It would be nice if God would just tell us our individual calling, as occasionally happens in a patriarchal blessing. But sometimes that doesn't occur. There are times when God would rather have us wrestle with that issue until we *discover* our individual calling. If you are in that situation here are a few things that might offer a clue regarding what God has called you to do on an individual basis:

1. You've Been Asked to Provide Ministry That Uses A Particular Gift

Instead of calling ourselves, it is more often the case that others ask us. If God has gifted you and called you to a particular avenue of service, it is only natural that people will ask you to perform that ministry.

Consider this hypothetical example:

- Do people ask you to help them with their taxes? No
- Do people ask you to design a website for them? No
- Do people ask you to sing? Yes
- Do people ask you to lead a book study? No

The “yes” response above might be one indication that singing is your gift and thus a calling from God. It does not eliminate the others. You might be excellent in preparing taxes, creating a website or leading a book study, but no one has asked you to do those things. When other people are easily able to recognize that you’re good at something, they will often tell you how talented you are at that thing, and they will frequently ask you to use your giftedness on their behalf. That can sometimes indicate a calling from God.

2. It Fits Like A Glove

A second clue something is an individual calling from God is every aspect of that particular skill comes naturally to you. Each step of the process requires very little thought on your part. Everything about that gift makes intuitive sense. Your skills align perfectly with the specific ministry you intend to provide. In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddel said, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure.”

3. You Become Passionate About The Gift

Is there an activity you do for others in which you become so immersed that you lose track of time? You might spend hours and feel physically exhausted. Despite your weariness, you feel an innate sense of deep satisfaction at having completed the task. You become so passionate that you’d happily do it for someone else without being paid. If that’s the case, it may be a calling.

4. You Do It In Service To Others

A ministry is not provided for your glory or benefit. As a steward of that gift you are called to render service to God. In Mosiah 1:49-50, King Mosiah said:

... when ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God. Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then had not ye ought to labor to serve one another?

WHY IS INDIVIDUAL GIFTEDNESS IMPORTANT?

Imagine that you are trying to organize a track team for events like sprints, long-distance running, shot put, pole vault, long jump, high jump, etc. As the new coach for this track team you want participants who can excel in each event.

However, instead of testing their competency, you just ask them to volunteer. You ask, “Who wants to do the pole vault? Who wants to run the 50-meter dash? Who wants to take the 1500-meter run? Who wants to throw the shot put?” Everyone just volunteers. If your goal is participation, then that works. But if your goal is to surpass other teams and win the meet, this approach of volunteering doesn’t work very well!

Sometimes people have no understanding of their abilities or limitations. What if the person who volunteered for pole vaulting does it a couple of times and discovers he’s afraid of heights? What if the one who wanted to

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throw the shot put has very little strength in his upper body? What happens if the individual running the 50 can't get out of the blocks? What if the 1500-meter person has no endurance?

Rather than letting people volunteer, wouldn't it make more sense to test their giftedness? You might have each person take a turn at the pole vault and see who can get over the highest bar? Wouldn't you want to test everyone to see who is fastest at the 50-meter run? Wouldn't you want to test them on the shot put before you make them the team's representative for that event?

Why are we using this analogy, and what does it mean? In a race, speed matters. **In ministry, the individual calling and gifts God has given us matter.**

WHEN I FAIL TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S CALLING

There are times we can become very excited about doing something very significant for God's kingdom. We all want to do something that is bigger and more impressive. We sometimes launch projects that we think will be a great blessing to the cause of Zion and then watch as our efforts fall flat.

At this moment, are you suffering from a personal defeat because you failed to properly discern God's calling for your life? Are you wondering why he didn't come to your rescue? It's usually because God has a better way that he wants to use your giftedness. Perhaps the original dream you had arose from your own ego rather than a divine calling. We sometimes get headed in a direction with such force and speed that God frequently has to put roadblocks in our lives to turn us around and send us in the right direction.

When we fail to achieve a goal that we thought was our calling from God, God doesn't want us to be discouraged. Instead, he wants us to believe he is helping us and working for our good. He wants us to view setbacks as part of his plan for our lives. When we experience painful setbacks, we need to realize that God is still there and is calling us in a different direction. He has not abandoned us.

God loves us too much to respond to our grumbling, complaining and self-pity. Much of our suffering comes from our shortsightedness and our inability to realize in every circumstance God is working for our good – always, no exceptions!

God is more interested in our desire to please him and do his will than he is in the greatness of our accomplishments. Think of Stephen in Acts 7. He was a young man with plans for a long life and thoughts that he might accomplish much for God's kingdom. But instead, his life was suddenly cut short in a gruesome way.

God led Stephen in a different direction. His plans changed, but God's plan didn't! Stephen was permitted to be a martyr for Christ, and his final sermon was recorded for many generations of people to read, but that might not have been what Stephen originally set out to do. However, God had a plan and calling for Stephen all along!