



Calling: A
Living the Way
Guide





Calling is the practice of joining God in His mission to overcome evil with goodness in the person of Jesus.

This workshop will guide participants to ...

- Identify how the world's brokenness impacts their sense of purpose and identity
 - Find their identity and purpose in their life with God
 - Discover God's personal and specific call to join in His mission

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'" (Matthew 25:34-36)

Resources you will need ...

LTW Calling Workshop Guide
Os Guinness, *Rising to the Call (Chapters 2 and 3)*
The Bible, any translation
startlivingtheway.com

Session One | A World Broken



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What is something recent that is bringing you joy?
What is something recent that is causing you stress?

1. What is your current understanding of calling?
2. How do you hope to grow spiritually over the coming weeks?
3. Walk through your expectations re: frequency and preparation for meetings.

Session One | A World Broken

Count the Ways

Our understanding of calling begins with a harsh reality. The world is seriously broken. We don't need to look far to find the wreckage. It's in the pain of hunger felt by children in poverty. It's in the destructive winds of a spring's storm. It's in the widow's pangs of abject loneliness. This world is not the way it's supposed to be, plain and simple. The trials and tragedies we face are out-of-step with God's design plan. His world was made to be whole and to flourish. Yet we've moved quite far "east of Eden," as it were.

Scripture is refreshingly honest about our sorry situation.

The Bible doesn't deny it, sugarcoat it, or hide from it. Rather, it faces our plight head on—and even offers dramatic hope despite it.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8:22-25)

1. In this passage, Paul tell us that *all* of creation—in its entirety—has been aching to be redeemed. What specific types of brokenness in our world come to mind when you read this?

2. What is the hope we have that Paul identifies? Do your best to put your response into plain and simple language.

Sin is responsible for the ruin we see in the world (see Isaiah 59:2 and Romans 6:23). It has caused three distinct kinds of brokenness that we all have and continue to experience.

Sin is any way we choose to love created things more than the Creator.

1. **Spiritual Brokenness.** We were made to be in constant, intimate, and life-giving relationship with God. That's now gone because of sin. As a result, we are separated from God and experience lostness, isolation, loneliness, and guilt.

2. **Relational Brokenness.** We were made for peace and harmony with one another. This means not only did God intend the absence of strife, but also positive goodwill towards others. Sin wrecked that beautiful plan. Now we experience animosity, injustice, and greed.

3. **Natural Brokenness.** We were made to exercise kindly dominion over all creation—including plant life and animal life. God intended that we benefit and live in accord with it. Again, sin ruined this vision. We now strive against creation, use it wastefully, and experience natural disasters.



Session One | A World Broken

Who Am I and Why Am I Here?

That's all admittedly heavy stuff. It's real, but weighty. It's easy, amidst all the brokenness, to wonder who we are and where in the world we fit in. How can we possibly play some role, let alone alleviate, the world's wreckage? Who are we in this sea of uncertainty? What is our purpose? Can we find an atmosphere of meaning and security?

These questions all surround the topic of this workshop. **Calling**. We want to understand who we are and what is the grand purpose for which God gave us life. It's not dramatic to say that these questions are the most important we face. It's difficult to have a full life without some compelling answer to them. Let's call this set of concerns **the calling question**. The calling question, to sum it up, is the matter of who we are and what we are here for.

How have you grappled with the calling question in your own life?

Many of us live feeling disappointed and untethered to a bigger sense of purpose. If you have experienced the same, don't feel alone. In fact, even better, let's turn a corner. There's good news. Great news, even. Gospel news! God is good and merciful and wise. And He's revealed life-altering answers to the calling question. We are going to dive into those in the following three sessions. First, though, let's discover the hope that God offers a tattered world like ours.

Hope is central to answering the **calling** question. Without hope, there's no reason to think the world will be made well. In turn, there's no reason to think our lives have purpose beyond the day-to-day mundane. Hope is found, ultimately, not in something we do, but in God's mission. You may not have known that God has a mission, but He does, and it's an extraordinary one. In short, God is setting the world aright—healing it of its ruin—in all its shattered spaces. This includes spiritual, relational, and natural brokenness. And here's God's endgame:

¹ Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4)

Wonder of wonders, God will one day re-create His broken creation into what he meant it to be. It'll be a place of boundless joy, love, and peace. Now, ready for the breathtaking hope? He's begun this restoration *here and now*. Through the person of Jesus, He is even now bringing justice, mercy, and salvation to spaces once broken. That's Jesus' point when He says, "... the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21).

1. What is God's ultimate plan for His creation? How does that give us hope here and now?



Session One | A World Broken

2. Where do you see, even now, God working towards the kind of restoration He will one day complete?

3. How has this session affected your understanding of the calling question?

Let's sum it up. Yes, the world is broken. Badly. That's just reality. We all feel it deep down. And, because of the depth of the wreckage, we aren't sure why our lives matter and have purpose. But God has rescued us from this uncertainty in the unparalleled person of Jesus.

God's mission is to overcome evil with goodness in the person of Jesus Christ.

To be clear, this means that this shattered world will not remain the same. Things will never be the same because Jesus has "... moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, *The Message*), i.e., into our lives and world. Jesus has already begun to remake all things. Here's the punchline.

God calls every one of us who knows Jesus to participate in His restorative mission.

That's where our hope, purpose, and calling in life comes from, i.e., the very mission of the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He invites us to use our deepest passions, desires, skills, and giftings to join in His mission. Fasten your seatbelts. It'll be a wild ride, but undeniably and delectably good! **Discuss any additional responses you have to this session together.**

Exercises for Session Two

1. Read "Everyone, Everywhere, Everything" (chapter 2) from *Rising to the Call* by Os Guinness.
2. In the next session, we will learn about our primary calling—to live our lives in the presence of God. In preparation, read through John 15:1-4 slowly and meditatively each day for a week. Make note (perhaps in a journal) of what God reveals as you dig deeper into the text.
3. Complete the discussion questions for session two. Come ready to discuss with others!

Interlude

You've finished the first session of this workshop! You're admitting and confronting the most common modern addiction—to hurry, worry, and busyness. You're officially on a path to something better and God-ordained. This is an exciting opportunity!

Don't forget that it's best to go on this sacred journey alongside others. Make some time to get together and deepen your relationships. Grab coffee just to chat. Go to a baseball game. Gather your families for a movie night. Do something that simply celebrates the joys of being human and knowing others. This is good for its own sake but will also help you grow as you complete future sessions.



Session Two | Called to Jesus



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. Is there anything causing you anxiety, worry, or fear in the past weeks? Pray for one another about these things.

1. Share your experience with meditating on John 15:1-4. What did God reveal to you? Were you challenged or do you plan to alter your daily rhythms in any way as a result?
2. According to Os Guinness, what is our primary calling? What is our secondary calling? What is the relationship between these two callings?

Session Two | Called to Jesus

Nothing Matters More

It's easy to think that *calling* is synonymous with our work. After all, we are an intensely career focused society. We dedicate years of preparation and financial resources to finding the right job and climbing corporate ladders. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that *calling-as-my-job* is the default understanding that people have. Here's the deal. Your job may (or may not) afford you the space to fulfill your calling, but your job is not identical to it. The most prominent use of calling in the New Testament, in fact, reveals to *whom* it is we are called, rather than to *what*.

¹ But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have **called** you by name; you are mine. ² When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. (Isaiah 43:1-2 NLT)

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon **called** Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were **called** to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

The highest call we can ever receive is to live unreservedly in the presence of Jesus.

1. How does this biblical reality about calling challenge our modern way of thinking?

2. Why, according to these verses, is our calling to be with Jesus so fundamental to all of life?

Your calling is not primarily to accomplish something. It's not to strive, impress, or achieve. Your primary calling is to be a son or daughter of God who lives moment-by-moment in the transformative presence of Jesus. On that note, here is possibly the single most important passage about calling in the entire Bible.

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:1-5)

Bearing fruit in life is ultimately not about effort, but about abiding in Jesus.



Session Two | Called to Jesus

1. What do you think it means, practically, to remain in Jesus? How do we do that?
2. How do you think we bear fruit simply by remaining in Jesus? Have you experienced this in your life?

How to Remain

If our primary calling is to remain in Jesus, then it's crucial we learn how to do so. God's given us practical ways to grow in the art of remaining in Him. Here are the central ones we encounter in the Bible.

Practicing the Presence of God. This one is quite simple. As we go about our days, we learn to "pray without ceasing," as Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. We do this by turning our attention—in heart, mind, and spirit—to the Holy Spirit that resides in us. We begin by being aware of His presence as we go about our daily activities. Here we're talking the regular stuff of life, e.g., grocery shopping, conversing with family, attending meetings, or doing dishes. We practice God's presence by fostering awareness that He is with us, loves us, and guides us.

Then, we move from awareness to actively conversing with Holy Spirit. We share, aloud or in silence, the joys, sorrows, ups, and downs that our days hold. We tell Jesus how we are being affected, how we desire to impact others, and how we need his help. As we commit our lives to it, practicing God's presence becomes a fruitful way of living.

Silence and Solitude. When we practice being still and alone with God, we imitate the devotion of Jesus himself. For instance, when Jesus experiences grief (Matthew 14:1-13), needs to rejuvenate (Mark 6:30-32), or is about to make a major decision (Luke 6:12-13), He practices silence and solitude. These practices are an under-utilized and yet crucial part of our lives with God. The good news is that engaging in them is quite simple.

Pick a block of time (at least a couple hours) and a quiet space (e.g., a room at home or a park bench) and bring no agenda other than being with God. Sit in His presence. Allow Him to speak. Listen intently. Pay attention to what he brings to mind. It might be an affirmation of His love for you, conviction about some unchecked sin, or something He wants to heal in your life. God is in charge of the time. There is nothing to fear and everything to gain.

The bad news is that modern living makes it challenging to do this. We are busy. Crazy busy. We are distracted. Crazy distracted. Time is not found. It is made. We must be very intentional to prioritize this aspect of our life with God. Make time. Make space. You'll be thrilled you did.



Session Two | Called to Jesus

Centering and Fixed Prayers. We often prioritize asking God for things to the exclusion of prayers that refocus our lives on God's presence. Centering prayers are words we say throughout the day to bring us back into awareness of God-with-us. For instance, you might say the prayer of the tax collector from Jesus' parable, "Lord, have mercy on me, sinner" (Luke 18:13). The more we say centering prayers as we go about the day's activities, the more we remain in the Spirit.

Fixed prayers are ones we say at set times in our day, again, to refocus us on Jesus. So, for instance, you might pause at 10AM and 2PM every day to say the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) and some requests for yourself and those around you.

Discuss together which of these practices you'd like to try in the coming week.

We learn to live into our primary calling—to be with God—through these and other biblical practices. The impact is tremendous. Life-with-God transforms everything about life-within and life-with-others. Next session, we will dig into the specific calling God has given you as you live out of his transformative presence.

Exercises for Session Three

1. Read "Do What You Are," (chapter 3) from *Rising to the Call* by Os Guinness..
2. Complete an Enneagram assessment (good options can be found at truity.com and wepps.com) and come ready to discuss your results together. It might be helpful to consult the book, *The Road Back to You*, and research your type before you meet next.
3. Complete the discussion questions for session three. Come ready to discuss!

"Calling resists privatization by insisting on the totality of faith. Calling resists politicization by demanding a tension with every human allegiance and association. Calling resists polarization by requiring an attitude toward, and action in, society that is inevitably transforming because it is constantly engaged. Grand Christian movements will rise and fall. Grand campaigns will be mounted and grand coalitions assembled. But all together such coordinated efforts will never match the influence of untold numbers of followers of Christ living out their callings faithfully across the vastness and complexity of modern society." (*Os Guinness*)



Session Three | Redeem What's Broken



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. How have you spent your free time over the past weeks? What words would you use to describe it (e.g., rejuvenating, refreshing, wasteful, fretting)?

1. Os Guinness says that calling reverses our conventional thinking. We shift from "You are what you do" to "Do what you are." What does he mean? How does it affect your sense of calling?
2. Discuss your Enneagram results together. What did you learn about yourself? Hold on to your thoughts. We will pick them back up in session four.

Session Three | Redeem What's Broken

In the last session, we discovered the heart of calling—to live all of life with God. It's the greatest call we could ever hope or dream to receive. We are called to relationship with the Creator and Sustainer of all things. In this session, we will learn what this means for our calling to redeem the world from brokenness. The call to be with God has massive consequences for how we will find purpose in our activities. There are two aspects we will discuss. The **first** is called contemplation and the **second** is our specific calling.

A Life of Contemplation

Contemplation might conjure up images of monks living quietly on a hillside in Italy. And, indeed, the monastic life involves meditation on God and his kingdom. However, the truth is that contemplation is a **calling** for everyone who knows Jesus. When we contemplate, we reflect on what the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us means for all of life. We then apply it accordingly. This means we live out of the power of God's presence when we are at work, home, our neighborhoods, churches—everywhere! There is no space or atmosphere that should remain untouched by God's presence. Contemplation is the integration of God's way of living for us into every area of our lives.

¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:16-17)

How does the the Holy Spirit dwelling in us help us practice contemplation?

To do everything in the name of Jesus means to act always out of His presence within us. It means we all, regardless of our specific callings (more on this in a moment) are called to seek justice where we see injustice. To show mercy. To offer forgiveness. To extend grace. To promote reconciliation.

Pause for a moment. Think back to session one and the broken places of our world—the spiritual, relational, and natural wreckage. Now, catch this. Contemplation means that we are called to nothing short of God's mission in those broken places! We are called to join in His redemptive work. We not only experience brokenness—that's life—but we get to join with the God of the universe to bring healing. It's extraordinary. It's breathtaking. That's **calling**.

1. What would it look like for you to "... do all in the name of the Lord Jesus?" If you did this consistently and eagerly, what would look different in your home? Work? School? Church?

2. What kinds of wreckage are especially evident to you right now? Are you or others around you experiencing brokenness?

3. How do you think God might want to bring redemption through you?



Session Three | Redeem What's Broken

A Specific Calling

Contemplation happens because of God's restorative work inside of us. It's the **calling** all followers of Jesus have to join Him in bringing light to darkness. Let's zoom in further. God gives us each a specific call. It's the sum of your experiences, personality, passions, giftings, and season in life. It's bigger than a job title or a role.

A *title* is a term that describes what you do in a certain context. You may, for instance, be a student, librarian, nurse, or engineer. Your *roles* describe who you are relationally—with respect to other people. So, you might a sister, father, or friend. **Calling** may (or may not) include the titles and roles you have, but it is always bigger than just those. It is a way of being to which you are summoned by God *as you go about* the various titles and roles you assume.

1. What titles and roles do you currently assume? How have these changed over the years?

2. How have your titles and roles helped facilitate or enhance your sense of calling? Have they ever affected it negatively?

If your specific calling is not your job, a title, or a role, then what is it? Glad you asked. Here it is:

Calling is the practice of joining God in his mission to overcome evil with goodness in the person of Jesus.

Let's break this definition down. **First**, your calling is something in which you join with God (see session two!). We never go about calling alone. We are never asked to change the world by our own efforts and devices. That's astoundingly good news.

Second, your calling is always redemptive. It overcomes evil with goodness. For instance, you may be called to teach the truth in a world of falsehood. You may be called to be merciful in a world of ruthlessness. You may be called to bring order in a world of chaos.

Third, your calling is a practice. It's something you *discover* and then *do* with the help of God and with all your might. It's the reason for which you were placed on this earth. It's why you've had the experiences you've had. It's why you are passionate about what you are.

" So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

What excites you about discovering your specific calling?



Session Three | Redeem What's Broken

In the final session, we will get practical and cover how we discover the specific and redemptive calling God's given to each of us. Hear that. You, *yes you*, have been called by God for a reason at a time like this!

Exercises for Session Four

1. Take time to go over the most significant events, influences, and people in your life. Begin in childhood, if possible, and make your way to the present. This will take more than a few minutes and is done best as you pray along the way. Really take stock of what's shaped you into the person you are today. Write down what you discover and bring it to session four.
2. Ask two or three people close to you what they believe to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses. Don't be afraid to hear what they have to say. It's good data for understanding your calling. Also, do the same for yourself—list what you believe to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses. Again, write these down and bring them to session four.
3. Go back over your Enneagram results. If you haven't already, try to read the chapter on your number in the book, *The Road Back to You*. Jot down any relevant notes and bring them with you to session four.
4. Finally, make a list of your greatest passions in life. What do you care about most? What shattered places in the world most break your heart? Write these down and, yes, bring them with you to session four.

Interlude

You've finished the third session of this workshop! In the final session, we will put all that we've covered together and draw some conclusions about your calling. It'll be exciting stuff.

Don't forget that it's best to go on this sacred journey alongside others. Make some time to get together and deepen your relationships. Grab coffee just to chat. Go to a baseball game. Gather your families for a movie night. Do something that simply celebrates the joys of being human and knowing others. This is good for its own sake but will also help you grow as you complete future sessions.

“The greatest gift in life is life itself. Your life is not an accident. God wanted you to be. How then are you searching for purpose in your life, your own ultimate why for everything you do?” (Os Guinness)



Session Four | Discover Your Calling



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. How often have you been jealous, critical, or irritable towards others these past weeks? Reflect on the reasons for this and pray for one another.

How have you grown in your understanding of calling through these first three sessions? What have you learned about God? What have you learned about yourself?

Session Four | Discover Your Calling

Where We've Been

Let's review. In session one, we faced a hard fact of life. This world is broken. Sin has impacted it so badly that our spiritual and relational lives are fractured, and we experience pain from the natural world. We all feel it. This realization is the start of the road to discovering our calling.

Then, in session two, we discovered our primary calling. It comes before all titles, roles, and specific calls. It is, in fact, foundational to them. It's the calling to the presence of God himself (see Matthew 11:28-30). As Os Guinness says, there is no call without a Caller. It's fundamental.

Finally, in session three, we learned that we each have a specific call from God to join with Him in overcoming the world's brokenness. It's a call to seek the redemption of all things through truth, justice, mercy, service, and the like. Being with God is an exciting place to be.

In this session, we shift to the practical task of discovering the specific call that God gives to each of us. It's the product of a lifetime of experiences, passions, influences, and wiring.

Are you excited to discover the call that God's placed on your life?

What You've Learned

Get those notes ready. It's time to unpack the story of your life in all its intricate themes, influences, struggles, and passions. Agree together that this is a safe place for sharing even those things that require vulnerability to share. This can be a space of healing and looking forward to how God wants to redeem the brokenness through your unique experiences.

Do your best to consolidate your discoveries onto one or two easy-to-consult pages as you discuss together.

1. **Significant Events and People.** Share your notes on the most influential experiences and people in your life. Who and what has shaped you? What have been your major accomplishments? What have been your lowest moments? How have you grown?
2. **Strengths and Weaknesses.** Share notes on your major strengths and weaknesses. What themes emerged from what others said and how you assessed yourself?
3. **Enneagram.** Share notes about your personality type. Do your results fit your perception of who you are? What have you learned about your strengths? Weaknesses? What have you learned about how you best relate to others based on your personality?
4. **Passions.** Share your notes about your greatest passions in life. How have those changed over time? To what extent have you been able to pursue these passions?

Take the time you need to discuss these four areas. They are the building blocks to understanding the specific calling on your life. And note that your calling may well change over time. It grows as you do.



Session Four | Discover Your Calling

Put It All Together

Now it's time to put all this life data together. Let's home in on a specific **calling**—the unique way God's called you to join in His mission to overcome evil with goodness in the person of Jesus. Look back at the summary notes you took on your initial notes. Discuss the following questions together.

1. What major struggles emerged from your review of past experiences and influences? In what way might those difficult times have influenced what God has **called** you to do today?

2. What correlations did you discover between your strengths and passions? What does this suggest about your **calling**?

3. What correlations did you discover between your personality type, strengths, weaknesses and passions? What does this suggest about your **calling**?

4. Each of you share your observations with the other re: the calling you see taking shape in his or her life through this process. Take your time with this step. Your insights for one another are invaluable.

5. Try to draft a concise and specific statement of your specific **calling** in this season of life based on your research and discussions. Here are some examples.

- My calling is to give help and support to people who have been victims of violence.
- My calling is to teach the truth to young people about God and his kingdom.
- My calling is to create spaces of welcome and belonging through hospitality.
- My calling is to fight loneliness by forming spaces for people to be seen and heard.

Here's the amazing news. Your calling statement makes explicit the connection between the person God made you to be and His invitation to to join in His mission to overcome evil with goodness in the person of Jesus. Congratulations on traversing this beautiful terrain together!



Session Four | Discover Your Calling

Reflections on Calling

You've now encountered an essential practice God has given to build us in the way of Jesus. Take some time to reflect and celebrate what He has done. We invite you to continue your journey by digging into one of the other LTW guides offered at startlivingtheway.com!

1. How did you grow because of this practice? What was especially meaningful? What was challenging?
2. How do you plan to integrate a focus on calling as part of your regular spiritual life?
3. How do you plan to celebrate the good things God has done over these past weeks?

“Sometimes the opportunity doesn't involve going to a new place; it means finding a new and previously unrecognized opportunity in the old place.” (*John Ortberg*)

