
Engage MY Soul

A FOUR-PART STUDY GUIDE

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Who am I? What is my life about? What should I be living for?

Christ's mission in the world is not a mystery. He gives clear instructions to his disciples about what he wants them to do while they wait for his return: to go into all the world, baptizing all people in the name of the triune God, and teaching everyone to obey everything Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Every Christian is a member, or “body part,” of Christ's body, of which he himself is the head. Just as the head of a human body coordinates the entire body toward a single aim (e.g., walking up stairs, raking the yard), so too Christ, the Head of the Church, coordinates his entire body toward a single aim—the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

If the Great Commission is the orienting purpose of the body, and if we are all members of Christ's body, directed toward this singular mission by the Head of the body, then this means each of us has a unique part to play in the fulfillment of that mission. Not everyone is an eye, the apostle Paul reminds us, lest the body have no sense of hearing; nor is everyone an ear, lest the body have no sense of smell (1 Corinthians 12:17). We all together, as many parts of the body, make up the one body and contribute uniquely to Christ's singular aim of making his gospel known to the world.

But what is our personal contribution to Christ's mission in the world? How do we know what unique role we are called to play? Above all, we want clarity from God about our unique missional calling—the unique way we are designed, called, and gifted to contribute to Christ's mission in the world. Achieving this clarity is the aim of this four-part study guide.

ENGAGE MY SOUL

CONTEXT, GIFTING, AND PASSIONS

This study invites you to engage in a spiritual discernment process, as you seek clarity about what God may be calling you to do. Identifying your unique missional calling comes from prayerful reflection on three things:

CONTEXT

Clarity on your unique missional calling is deepened by considering the place in life that God, in his providential wisdom, has caused you to occupy. What are the unique challenges and opportunities of your context (i.e., your community, your family, your work environment, your neighborhood)? Where are you located? Who are the people around you? What opportunities and challenges are part of your context?

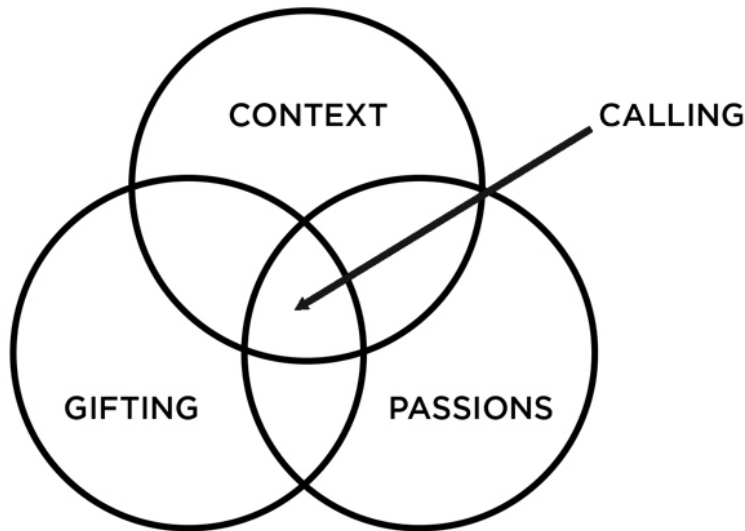
GIFTING

Clarity regarding your unique missional calling comes from a deep sense of your endowment of grace, or Spirit-given gifting. It comes from a rich understanding of what God has equipped you to do. What special gifts and capacities do you have? What is the unique story and experience that shapes who you are and the part you play in God's purposes? What skills do you possess? What gifts (i.e., graces) has God built into your life—whether through experience, training, or natural ability?

PASSIONS

Clarity regarding your unique missional calling is deepened when you consider your most dearly held convictions and passions. What aspects of Christ's kingdom work most deeply resonate with you? What areas of need stir your compassion and energy? What drives you and gets you out of bed in the morning?

God has created each of us uniquely with different gifting and passions. He has placed us in unique contexts. The place where these three areas—context, gifting, and passions—converge sheds light on our missional calling.



STUDY GUIDE FORMAT

Just like the church in Antioch (Act 13:1-3), when Paul and Barnabas were sent out on mission, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Christian community. As such, this guide is designed to be used together with your small group. But it can also be used to guide individual reflection.

This study guide is divided into four chapters. The first chapter invites you to embrace your context. The second chapter bids you to grasp your God-given gifts and abilities. The third chapter admonishes you to pursue your passions. And the final chapter guides you to prayerfully reflect on how this all comes together to clarify and cultivate God's unique calling on your life. If you are doing this study in a small group, the final section of each chapter invites you to share with your group your personal insights from each week and allows space for you to write down feedback you receive from fellow groups members.

The most important aspect of discovering God's call on your life is having a posture of submission, and a willingness to follow wherever Christ leads. As you begin each chapter, take time to present yourself again as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) and pray that the Lord would make his will known to you, for your joy, and for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

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SCRIPTURE

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

ACTS 17:16-23

EXPOSITION

The Apostle Paul was detained in Athens while waiting for his traveling companions. Never one to sit idle, Paul took a look around the city and felt compelled to engage the Athenians in dialog about the gospel. He begins his interaction with the Athenians by noting the highly religious nature of the Athenian society. The Athenians worshiped many gods and didn’t want to neglect any. To ward off the possibility that they were forgetting (and offending) a foreign god, they built an altar ‘to the unknown god’. Paul began there, and using their religious curiosity and “conscientiousness,” he launched into contextually relevant discourse about the true God (see the rest of Acts 17).

REFLECTION

Understanding your context, where you are situated, helps shape your understanding of your role in the mission of God. Just like Paul took into account the particularities of Athenian culture prior to sharing the gospel, so too is it wise to take into account the particularities of your cultural context.

In the space provided below, write down the things that come to mind regarding your context.

Where are you located? Who are the people around you? What is the political orientation, the socio-economic level, the moral framework, etc? Is it suburban, urban, culturally diverse? What are the unique challenges and opportunities of your context? Make a list of at least twenty characteristics that are true of your context. Write down whatever comes to mind—don't overthink it.

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SUMMARY

Now examine the list you've made. Pick the top three to five things on your list that you think are most significant about your context and write them here.

PRAYER

LORD OF THE WORLD AND MAKER OF ALL THINGS, I want to serve you and share your light with those around me. Help me to see the world as you see it. Help me to have a proper awareness and sensitivity to the needs, challenges, and opportunities of my context. Open my eyes to see how I can be used by you to bring the light of your truth to a world that so desperately needs it. I love you and want my world to love you too. Give me wisdom and courage toward that end.

AMEN.

DISCUSSION

Share with your group members your larger list, and then the top three to five items on your summary list. Note the sort of things others in the group wrote down, especially those who may share the same context. Based on the feedback, go back and re-examine your original lists, adding anything that comes to light through group discussion.

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SCRIPTURE

The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you.

EXODUS 31:1-6

EXPOSITION

The Lord set apart Bezalel and Oholiab to craft the tabernacle and its contents into which the Lord’s presence would dwell. These men were neither prophets, priests, nor kings; yet, God indwelt them by his Spirit to wrought powerful works for his people. This text reminds us that God uses people—regardless of rank, class, occupation, or skill-level—to contribute meaningfully to the mission.

REFLECTION

Grasping your gifting, how his Spirit has graced you, shapes the perception of your role in God's mission. Just as Bezalel and Oholiab were endowed with supernatural intellect and dexterity to craft implements for the tabernacle, so too you have been equipped with a gift-mix that may be employed in your unique missional calling.

In the space provided below, list your gifting, which includes the time, talent, and treasure you possess. Make a list of ten to twenty skills you possess that may be employed for kingdom work. Feel free to consult Romans 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12:27-30, and 1 Peter 4:10-12 but know that these are not exhaustive nor closed lists of grace-endowed gifts.

What special gifts and capacities do you have? What is the unique story and experience that shapes who you are and the part you play in God's purposes? What skills do you possess? What gifts (i.e., graces) has God built into your life—whether through experience, training, or natural ability?

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SUMMARY

Now examine the list you've made. Pick the top three to five things on your list that you think are most significant about your gifting and record them here.

PRAYER

GIVER OF EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT, you've endowed me by your grace and your empowering Spirit to work your works. Whether it is pushing a broom or building a rocket, I take not for granted how you've furnished my faculties for your purposes. Empty my pride in position or possessions, so I may be of use for your mission. Would you make known to me my unique missional calling in respect to my gift-mix and give me a vision to unleash these gifts for this calling?

AMEN.

DISCUSSION

Share with your group members your larger list, and then the top three to five items on your summary list. Note the sort of things others in the group wrote down, especially those who share similar gifting. Based on the feedback, go back and re-examine your original lists, adding anything that may come to light through group discussion.

ENGAGE MY SOUL

SCRIPTURE

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven . . . In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.”

NEHEMIAH 1:1-4; 2:1-5

EXPOSITION

The situation of Nehemiah’s city and people stirred him deeply and ignited his passion for God’s people and purposes. He engaged in a spiritual process of discernment through spiritual disciplines in order to determine how he might proceed. He remained in solitude, spent time fasting, and prayed for days. His prayer confessed sin on behalf of Israel, called God to remember his promises, and requested God’s favor and his success (cf. Nehemiah 1:5ff). He then approached Artaxerxes with his desire to rebuild Jerusalem.

REFLECTION

Pursuing your passions by exploring the beliefs, values, and convictions that drive your deepest desires increases the clarity of your unique missional calling. This is best exercised through active engagement in spiritual disciplines like solitude, fasting, and prayer, which allows space for reflection and discernment. Just as Nehemiah engaged in these disciplines, so too might you utilize spiritual disciplines to pinpoint what you should passionately pursue for your unique missional calling.

Begin a process that uncovers the passions you should pursue. Use the questions below to detect ten to twenty of your passions. Return to these questions in the coming weeks to see how these passions and desires become more deeply rooted convictions for your calling.

What aspects of Christ's kingdom-work most deeply resonate with you? What areas of need stir your compassion and energy? What drives you and gets you out of bed in the morning?

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SUMMARY

Examine the list you've made. Pick the top three to five passions you have and record them here.

PRAYER

RELENTLESS LORD, Stir my affections for your mission. Guide me to detect what most fuels my desires for you and increases my compassion for my neighbor. May those passions be kindling that set aflame my unique missional calling. Give me the sort of resolve that Nehemiah possessed and the kind of boldness he demonstrated as he pursued his passions.

AMEN.

DISCUSSION

Share with your group members your larger list, and then the top three to five items on your summary list. Note what others in the group recorded, especially those who may share similar passions. Based on your discussion, go back and re-examine your original lists, adding anything that may come to light through discussion.

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SCRIPTURE

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

GALATIANS 1:13-2:2

EXPOSITION

Paul's calling was not immediately activated. He spent years cultivating that calling. He devoted himself to reflection and solitude in the Gentile context of Arabia and Damascus before returning to consult with Peter and James in Jerusalem. He then went into fresh Gentile territories of Syria and Cilicia in order to exercise his gifting afresh. Ultimately, he returned to Jerusalem bringing along Barnabas and Titus to present as fruit of his work. There he received affirmation of his calling from those in Jerusalem.

REFLECTION

Where your context, gifting, and passions converge is where your unique missional calling becomes clarified. For some, these three line-up with a clear and immediate marching order. For others, an incubation period is required before your calling becomes activated. You may be in a brewing period—where your context, gifting, and passions ferment before you drink deeply of your calling. Nonetheless, now is the season to clarify and cultivate your calling.

What can you do to cultivate your calling? How can you master your context, gain facility with your gifts, and prayerfully foster your passions in the coming days, weeks, months, and years? How can you collaborate with others and receive accountability in regard to your unique missional calling? Who can affirm you in your calling? What steps do you need to take in order to become activated for your calling?

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SUMMARY

Based on your reflection, create three to five action steps that navigate you from cultivating to activating your unique missional calling.

PRAYER

MY COMPASS AND MY MAP, O LORD, help me to hold my plans loosely. For I do not know what may happen from day to day. As long as it is today, let me cultivate my passions and gifts so that they may be harnessed to reach my context. As I steep in your Word and prayer, in communion with you, may you direct me to your will for my calling. Use family and friends as helpful consultants. Would you give them wisdom to speak into my life so that my unique missional calling may be clarified?

AMEN.

DISCUSSION

Collaborate with your group and share your action steps. Note what others in the group recorded, especially those who may have a similar plan. Based on your discussion, go back and re-examine your plan, adding anything that may come to light through discussion.



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