

Week Four
Chapters 7-9

Sometimes we have little choice about our circumstances, and our vocation is about figuring out how to hear God's call in those circumstances.

- When has it been difficult for you to hear God's call? In what circumstances?
- How have you stayed in relationship with God in those times?
- How can you nurture what Cahalan calls "true hope" (101) in times of suffering?

In one of our most traditional calls to prayer we say to each other "The Lord be with you." Because we believe God is truly with us and within us, we have the opportunity to listen within ourselves to perceive God's call.

- How might you give yourself the gift of time to pause, to slow down, to enter into the silence that is a necessary part of discerning God's call within you?

Just as God is within us, so we are also ultimately, held within the heart of God. Seen in this way, even "dying becomes a calling within God" (118).

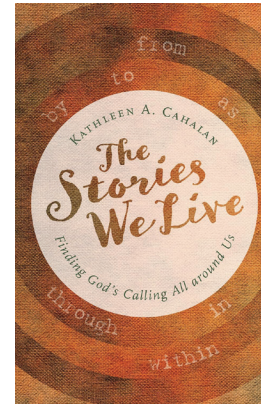
- How can you live so as to prepare to die?

Each human has their own individual stories of calling and vocation. In sharing those stories, we become more aware of how we are also called together as communities.

- Within your own context, how can you invite others into sharing their stories about vocation?

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The Stories We Live
Finding God's Calling
All around Us
by Kathleen Cahalan

"Christian vocation," says Kathleen Cahalan, "is about connecting our stories with God's story." *The Stories We Live* offers a fresh framework for considering God's call. It introduces new vocabulary for vocation through eight prepositions that show how we are called—by God, to follow, as we are, from loss, for service, in suffering, through others, and within God.

Questions for each week

A discussion group may use the following prompts as an icebreaker: What has been good, bad, and godly in the past week? *or* What was your moment closest to Christ?

As time permits, close in discussing: What else stood out in this week's reading?

Week One

Introduction and Chapters 1-2

In the introduction to this book Cahalan discusses the linguistic ways we use the concept of a "calling." Do you tend to think of calling as a verb or a noun? What do you think of exploring calling through prepositions?

In Chapter One, we find this statement "Perhaps a more helpful way is to say that God does not create you with a

vocation (one single plan that God has made) but with the capacity for vocations (the ability to engage in dialogue with God and others to create a plan for your life). In what ways does this seem consonant with your own life experience?

How have you felt God inviting you into your calling(s)? As a plan (an acorn), a journey (a pilgrimage), or a surprising discovery (an aha! moment)? What other images of God and vocation come to your mind from your callings?

Cahalan discusses several types of ways in which we live out our call to follow Jesus, including, follower, worshiper, witness, neighbor, forgiver, prophet, and steward. Tell about ways you have experienced some of these in your own life.

In discovering who we are, we are invited to explore our deepest self. Cahalan references Quaker author Parker Palmer's concept of the "true self" and the "false self." What "false self" images have you had to let go of over the years? How have you discovered something more about your true self?

Week Two *Chapters 3-4*

In Chapter Three, Cahalan talks about how we are called not in spite of the specifics of our life but within those specifics, whether they are age, gender, family history, life circumstances, skills, talents and so on.

- What are the particular contexts of your life?
- How have those contexts shaped your understanding of your callings?

"Human beings are not static, but continually in process" (34).

- How have your callings changed from when you were a child or youth to your current age?
- How have your experiences as a younger person influenced how you perceived your callings today?

Our Bible is filled with stories of people who are called from without much if any idea of where they are called to, including Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Naomi, Paul, Jesus himself, and many others. Tell about a time when you have experienced a call from something. How did that make you feel? What did you learn along the way?

Week Three *Chapters 5-6*

In figuring out what our callings are for, Cahalan references three questions on page 62. They are phrased informally as: "Do you get a kick out of it (your calling)?" "Are you any good at it?" and "Does anyone want you to do it?"

- How do these questions help you to reflect on the work to which you are called?

Sometimes we are called "to the work in the job, but perhaps not to the [specific] job [itself]" (72).

- How have you experienced finding new ways to express the work you are called to do, whether within the same job/context (pay, volunteer, family), or in a new one?

Our callings are often expressed in our interactions with others, whether friends, colleagues, family members, or role models. Sometimes we are the ones who invite others into their callings.

- Who has been an agent of God's calling for you?
- Who have you helped to discern their calling, whether by invitation, reflection, or some other way?
- How might your community become one in which participants encourage invite each other to explore the gifts they perceive in one another?